

Beyond Beliefs

An Analysis of Religion and the Secular in James K. A. Smith

Joel Gillin
Master's Program in Religion, Conflict, and Dialogue
October 2017

University of Helsinki		
Faculty Theology		
Writer Joel Gillin		
Title of thesis Beyond Beliefs: An Analysis of Religion and the Secular in James K. A. Smith		
Discipline Religion, Conflict, and Dialogue		
Type of Thesis Master's	Month and Year October 2017	Number of Pages 77
<p>Abstract</p> <p>This study is a descriptive account and analysis of the ideas and arguments of Canadian philosopher James K. A. Smith (1970 -) in regard to religion and the secular. Using Smith's published texts, the study examines some of the problems he sees with these concepts from different subfields of philosophy and evaluates Smith's proposed solutions.</p> <p>The study begins with a discursive overview of the issues scholars face in the study of religion and the secular. Next, the study examines Smith's engagement with theological traditions and postmodern thought to critique the epistemology and ontology of the secular, followed by Smith's articulation of a "liturgical" anthropology as a model for understanding religion and secular practices. The final chapter explores the implications of Smith's analysis and his advocacy of a post-secular approach to 1) the study of religion, 2) the public square, and 3) religious conflict.</p> <p>The study finds that Smith cogently employs postmodern thought to deconstruct the foundationalist epistemology of the secular. Furthermore, he argues that the secular relies upon an unsubstantiated ontology of closed, autonomous nature that gives secular theorizing and science an unwarranted privileged epistemic status. Modern philosophical anthropology is also found to be overly cognitive, and Smith proposes an original model emphasizing embodiment in which humans are desiring beings shaped by formative practices ("liturgies").</p> <p>With these results, Smith's post-secular approach to the study of religion shows that common distinctions between secular and religious beliefs and practices are misleading. A liturgical framework may provide better conceptual tools to locate and explain human behavior, including religious/secular violence, with some complications requiring further research. His analysis suggests a normative post-secularism which allows space for religious identities in the public sphere could potentially meet the challenges of pluralism and religious conflict.</p>		
Key Words James K. A. Smith, secular, religion, post-secularism, religious conflict		
Place of Storage Helsinki University Library, Library of the Central Campus, Theology		

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Many of the most influential figures of the nineteenth century—Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and others—believed that religion would fade away as societies industrialize.¹ Since World War II, it is widely agreed that religious affiliation, identification, and participation in Europe and parts of North America has declined significantly. Scholars have debated whether or not such decline, often known as “secularization,”² is inherently tied to modernization. Peter Berger, a leading sociologist of religion, was once a proponent of this theory, yet has since renounced it. He claims that, outside Europe, the world “is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places even more so.”³ Empirical data over the last couple decades has led many to doubt the theory, or at least the strongest versions of it.⁴ Scholar José Casanova has also written about the “resurgence” of religion—and of public religion⁵ in particular—indicating that the topic of religion and its place in modern society will likely continue to spark debate into the foreseeable future.

Scholarly research on religion and the notion of the secular is taking place alongside popular discussions about religion and politics and religious conflicts. Across the Western world, secularizing countries have been wrestling with their own histories and traditions as they negotiate the place of religion in their national identity and political life. One can see from the controversies over the inclusion of religion in the preamble to the European Constitution, the potential inclusion of Turkey in the European Union, and others examples that the place of religion is far from clear or settled. Within Europe, the public presence of religion has taken many forms. Some countries still have established state churches, while others have severed such institutional ties. In many German schools, teachers are banned from

¹ See Steve Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 170-94; Alan Aldridge, *Religion in the Contemporary World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), Chapter 4.

² There is debate whether secularization refers merely to the privatization of religion and decreased public significance, or to decreasing affiliation and participation. For a discussion, see Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularization and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10-11.

³ Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 2.

⁴ But Berger claims it should have been known earlier: “By the late 1970s it had been falsified with a vengeance. As it turned out, the theory never had much empirical substance to begin with.” See idem., “Sociology: A disinvitation?” *Society* 30, no.1 (1993), 15.

⁵ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

wearing religious garb.⁶ In France, that ban extends to students in classrooms, and Muslim women on public beaches have been forced to remove their “burkinis,” viewed by some as a violation the French principle of *laïcité*. The United States, by contrast, maintains a comparably high level of religiosity, while a strong institutional separation of church and state is vigorously defended. The vastly different arrangements of these modern societies indicates that the process of secularization has unfolded in myriad ways and that the public place of religion takes many forms. Many of these same countries are increasingly dealing with understanding the nature of violence and terrorism done in the name of religion and what the appropriate political responses are. And around the world, the role of religion in conflicts such as Israel/Palestine, the Sunni/Shia divide, the Central African Republic, and Myanmar (to name a few) remains disputed. These events and trends of the last several decades have led scholars like Jürgen Habermas, the foremost theorizer of the public sphere, to consider what (renewed?) relevance religion may have modern, secular societies.⁷

One growing concern over the last several decades has been the legitimacy and coherence of the categories of “secular” and “religion/religious.” As is the case in many academic fields, the terms of the debate are crucial. Though many popular level discussions in the media and political rhetoric, particularly since 9/11, assumes their coherence and validity, scholars in the fields of political science, philosophy, sociology, and others have little agreement over how to define and use these contested terms and categories. Without some consensus as to what constitutes religion or what is considered secular, negotiating religion’s place in a secular society and its role in conflict will be difficult. To improve research and debate on religion’s role in fomenting conflicts or its potential to help resolve them, scholars need more nuanced theories, definitions, and conceptual tools for understanding religion and clarity regarding what kinds of reasoning or practices are secular or religious.

⁶ “Discrimination in the Name of Neutrality Headscarf Bans for Teachers and Civil Servants in Germany,” Human Rights Watch, February 26, 2009. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/02/26/discrimination-name-neutrality/headscarf-bans-teachers-and-civil-servants-germany>

⁷ See Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, trans. C. Cronin (Oxford: Polity Press, 2008); idem, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (April 2006): 1-25; idem, “An Awareness of What is Missing,” in *Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, by Jürgen Habermas et al., trans. C. Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 15-23.

1.2. Methodology

This study has been written as part of a master's program in Religion, Conflict, and Dialogue. The program takes a normative perspective which, like peace and conflict research, seeks to better understand the nature of conflicts and the role (if any) of religion in them in order to promote dialogue and peace. The impetus behind the research for this thesis came from a sense that the terms and categories used in these discussions are often unclear and unhelpful. The aim, then, was to interrogate the concept of "religion" and the corresponding concept of the "secular" with hopes of finding useful applications in the context of this program. As such, this study critically analyzes the discourse of the secular and religion used in academic and political contexts, especially in relation to secularism and religious violence.

To make the scope of the study sufficiently narrow, I chose one contemporary scholar, James K. A. Smith, who writes cogently about these concepts, particularly in the context of the issues mentioned above. The study is a descriptive account and analysis of Smith's ideas and arguments in regard to religion and the secular. The sources that I use to provide this examination will come primarily from Smith's published works: books, chapters in edited volumes, and journal articles. Texts which focus on the nature of the secular and religion make up a considerable portion of his work and have been selected as a way to unpack his potential contribution to these discussions. A critical evaluation of some of Smith's conclusions on relevant points will also be given in order to further the aims of this study. When useful, I give attention to the intellectual context of Smith's contributions and their place in broader, ongoing conversations.

Though Smith's corpus has breadth, there is a thread of a persistently critical perspective toward secular modernity and how it has influenced various academic disciplines and discourses. Unlike some critics, a considerable portion of Smith's work also offers constructive, specific, and practical proposals. This makes his projects and analysis potentially valuable for theorists and practitioners alike.

1.3. Defining Terms: Whose religion? Which secularity?⁸

As this study will be engaging with the highly contested concept of the secular and its relationship vis-a-vis religion, it is important to clarify how these terms will be used. Though

⁸ A nod to Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), whose notion of traditioned rationality is indeed germane the topic.

it has Latin roots which can be traced back for well over a millennium, academic and popular discourses use *secular* in a variety of ways. Because of its influence and cogency, Charles Taylor's taxonomy in *A Secular Age* provides a helpful starting point. The first way that *secular* can be used is in the sense of societal differentiation, which we can refer to as secular₁.⁹ In contrast to pre-modern societies in which "political organization... was in some way connected to, based on, guaranteed by some faith in, or adherence to God, or some notion of ultimate reality, the modern state is free from this connection."¹⁰ Thus, in a modern secular₁ country, "the political society is seen as that of believers (of all stripes) and non-believers alike... [Y]ou can fully engage in politics without ever encountering God."¹¹ The United States, because of its tradition of the separation of church (i.e., religious institutions) and state, is thus a secular₁ country, even though the populace itself is religious, particularly by Western standards. This sense of *secular* can also be understood through the sacred/profane paradigm in which, for example, church-related activities and vocations are sacred, while carpentry or medical jobs are secular₁.

The term *secular* can also refer to the "falling off of religious belief and practice."¹² This second sense—secular₂—is distinctly modern, and also accompanies modern notions of religion. The secular₂ in this sense refers to more than a mere separation of institutions and vocations and suggests a distinct epistemological status. Secular₂ beliefs and knowledge, for example, are religiously neutral and not dependent upon a particular tradition. A secular₂ person does not look to religious texts or traditions or the supernatural for knowledge, truth, or meaning but rather to secular₂ beliefs and values derived from reason. A secular₂ public space uses only non-sectarian, a-religious language and reason that is universally accessible. It is this sense of *secular* which will be examined in this study. The secularization thesis, for example, posits that societies will become not only secular₁, but secular₂. So while the institutions of the United States are secular₁, Americans are less secular₂ than much of Europe. Note also that in this study, "modern" is not a mere description of time (as in

⁹ This subscript notation is taken from James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 21.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2007), 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2. But it goes beyond the sociological phenomenon of decreased identification with organized religion.

“contemporary”), but generally referring to the thought and societal changes tied to the Enlightenment, and thus closely related to “secular.”¹³

There are a host of derivative terms associated with *secular*, some of them already mentioned: secularism, secularist, secularization, secularity. This study focuses on the secular as defined above and will at points interact with these related terms which will be used in the sense of secular₂. So secularism (or secularism₂—examined in chapter 2) will refer to the normative view that the public sphere should be secular₂. A secularist would support that view. Secularization entails not just institutional differentiation but declining religious belief, participation, etc.¹⁴ There are of course other versions of the secular and secularism. As Saba Mahmood has noted, “secularism is a historically shifting category with a variegated genealogy,” which is why the terms must be clear.¹⁵

So what is “religion”? While the scholarly study of religion has producing shelves full of literature, researchers have yet to find consensus on the definition of religion or on what rituals, practices, or beliefs should be considered religious. Particularly since the advent of postmodernism, many have sought to avoid essentialistic definitions or characterizations of religion as *sui generis*. Jonathan Z. Smith, for example, a prominent religious studies scholar, makes the claim that “religion has no independent existence apart from the academy.” He says that

while there is a staggering amount of data, phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religion — there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no existence apart from the academy.¹⁶

While these claims are boldly stated, they reflect a certain scepticism among some scholars of religion that a category of “the religious” can be clearly demarcated and cordoned off from secular objects, people, practices, and ideologies.¹⁷ Anthropologist Talal Asad similarly has

¹³ For example, “modern” and “secular” epistemology would essentially be the same thing in Smith’s writing. “Modern” is broader in its connotations, such that secular/religious distinctions and debates take place in the advent of modernity and within its context.

¹⁴ Note that Taylor’s entire project attempts to understand the “secular” in a *third* sense. In a “secular age,” according to Taylor, religious belief is simply an option among many others. The “plausibility structure” has changed such that religious belief is contested. Taylor’s massive tome seeks to narrate the story of how and why secularization in this third sense has occurred.

¹⁵ Saba Mahmood, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006), 332n11.

¹⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi.

¹⁷ Besides Jonathan Z. Smith, see William C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1962); Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, trans. William Sayers (Baltimore:

written that “there can be no universal definition of religion, not only because its constitutional elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes.”¹⁸

What value is there to studying religion if it cannot be defined? The contested nature of concepts and phenomena does not necessarily deem scientific inquiry into them as useless. Even Jonathan Z. Smith, cited above, recognizes that though religion is a constructed concept, scholars must nonetheless have disciplinary horizons.¹⁹ Reacting against what he considers the postmodern trend to deny to reality of religion altogether, sociologist Steve Bruce says that a definition should come from “broad contemporary common-sense reflection on the matter” and judged by the explanatory power provided by a definition/theory. He offers the following: Religion “consists of beliefs, actions and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose.”²⁰ The definition resonates with common Western sensibilities about the nature of religion. But there *are* issues with the explanatory power of this and many other definitions, as will be discussed below.

These varying definitions, theories, and approaches to the study of religion demonstrate the complexity of a understanding its relationship to the secular. Yet the contested nature of the concepts has not ended scholarly and popular discussions the important issues of religion’s role in a secular society and its relationship to violence and conflict. As these topics remain in headlines and among the most persistent social and political issues in the world, an interrogation of these concepts and their theoretical background is needed more than ever. To pursue this, this thesis turns to the work of James K. A. Smith.

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); William Arnal and Russell McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of 'Religion'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Christopher R. Cotter and David G. Robertson, *After World Religions: Reconstructing Religious Studies* (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁸ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 9.

¹⁹ Jonathan Z. Smith says that religion is a “second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as ‘language’ plays in linguistics or ‘culture’ plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon.” See his “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 281-282.

²⁰ This and the above quotation are from Steve Bruce, “Defining Religion: A Practical Response.” *International Review of Sociology* 21, no. 1 (2011): 112.

1.4. James K. A. Smith

As a contemporary philosopher, James K. A. Smith's projects have challenged the notion of the secular, as well as modern understandings of religion. Through an engagement with postmodern French philosophy, phenomenology, and thinkers from his own Christian tradition, Smith has published a numbers of articles, essays, and books which have sought to re-tool the disciplines of philosophy of the religion and the sociology of religion. His work is highly critical of the influence of modernity and secular reason on those scholarly disciplines, and his projects are directly relevant to discussions of secularism and the relationship between religion and conflict.

Smith interacts with and appropriates the work a number of distinct traditions and individual thinkers. His interlocutors often include Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Pierre Bourdieu and others influenced by postmodern thought. This tradition is made up mostly of thinkers with no confessional (religious) commitments, but who nonetheless offer (sometimes implicit) critiques of certain varieties of the secular and secularism. Smith has also been associated with Radical Orthodoxy, a "traditionalist" movement or theological sensibility associated with John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and others who have used postmodern thought to critique modernity.

Other important theological influences on Smith are the (Dutch) Reformed tradition and pentecostalism. While notably different in theology and practice, Smith identifies with each of these Protestant traditions in different ways. The former has an intellectual heritage dating back the nineteenth century, with figures like Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyewerd offering unique accounts of social and political philosophy. Pentecostalism (or charismatic Christianity) lacks the intellectual heritage of the Reformed tradition but nonetheless exemplifies a certain challenge to secular modernity with its emphasis on the activity of God through the Holy Spirit (and the rise of pentecostal Christianity globally has also contributed to doubts about secularization in modernizing countries). In addition, Smith sees in certain manifestations of both an emphasis on embodiment in their worship services (liturgical and charismatic), which will be an important part of his philosophical anthropology.

In all of these traditions, Smith notes a common thread: Saint Augustine. As one of the most important figures in the Western intellectual tradition, this may not be surprising. But as

a philosopher and theologian working in a pre-modern, pluralistic environment, Smith sees Augustine's epistemology and his emphasis on the importance of love/desire as important resources for grappling with the challenges of modernity. Smith sees an Augustinian influence on phenomenology and Radical Orthodoxy, and considers him the "patron saint of the Reformers."²¹

A thread tying together many of Smith's project has been the desire to "call into question the foundational metaphysical, epistemological, and anthropological assumptions—or what we might call 'faith commitments'—that undergird modernity."²² Working out of the different disciplines and traditions, Smith articulates a critique of the secular that scholars both in and outside of religious traditions have engaged. He has sought to re-tool disciplines which study religion to overcome the methodological limitations of viewing religion through a modern construal of the human person, thereby opening up space to see religion in places overlooked. Other projects of his have questioned the epistemological and ontological assumptions undergirding secularism. His work also offers positive formulations of what "post-secular" public space—in the academy, politics, etc.—might entail.

An important aspect of Smith's work is its position vis-a-vis academia and practice-oriented literature. Though Smith has published multiple academic books and tens of articles, he has also published books and articles at the popular level. Some of his work straddles the middle ground of these styles. For example, the project analyzed mostly in chapter 3—the Cultural Liturgies trilogy—is in this third category (and unfortunately, the third installment was not published until after this thesis was handed in). As he notes in the introductions, Smith's aim is a renewal of practice in education, ecclesial life, and research. There are proposals and elements intended for scholars, but there is conscious and deliberate limitation in an attempt to make somewhat of a hybrid. Because of this, some specialized conversations and clarifications are placed in the footnotes, and some nuance may be lost. This thesis has attempted to be charitable by considering the nature of Smith's project, and sought to use his corresponding academic publications to fill out some details.

²¹ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 7.

²² James K. A. Smith, "What Hath Cambridge to do with Azusa Street? Radical Orthodoxy and Pentecostal Theology in Conversion," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 25, no. 1 (2003), 102-103.

Another important consideration is that Smith often writes from an openly theological and Christian perspective. *Desiring the Kingdom*, for example, and the whole Cultural Liturgies series, was written with the intention of helping churches and Christian educational institutions reform their practices.²³ But because much of his analysis is not directly dependent on his personal commitments and draws heavily on philosophers and scholarship from outside his own tradition, it can easily be appropriated and endorsed by those who do not share his confessional commitments. It is outside the scope of this study to examine the relationship between Smith's theological orientation and arguments and his scholarship. Thus, confessional references are generally omitted even when they are directly embedded in sentences and texts.²⁴

1.5. Relevance to Religion, Conflict, and Dialogue

How does this thesis contribute to study of religion, conflict, and dialogue? Globalization, modernization, and post-colonial conditions have produced new challenges to politics and social relations. In Western societies, various versions of secularist political regimes are in force and cultural and religious diversity continues to increase. Europe still struggles to grapple with the legacy of Christianity, its own religious identity, and the increased attention given to Islam and Muslims in the wake of 9/11 and refugees from wars in the Middle East. These challenges demand thorough and interdisciplinary analysis to better understand religion, secularity, and how the two relate in modern society.

An examination of how, or whether, religion relates to conflict at any level intensity must begin with an adequate definition or theory of religion. Most discussions, whether popular or scholarly, of religious violence or conflict take for granted that there is some other kind of conceptual distinction to be made with other kinds of violence. Yet in the latter half of the twentieth century, much theoretical work has posed serious questions about these modern

²³ See James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

²⁴ Smith's arguments do not generally require presupposing the truth of Christian claims. But Smith *would*, however, argue that all scholarship rests upon presuppositions, faith commitments, and—to use Foucault's term—"unthoughts," so the prohibition of "religious" perspectives from the academy is actually an impediment to a robust pluralistic public sphere. Indeed, central to Smith's critique of secular public sphere is that *all* perspectives and the people that hold them are ultimately confessional, and thus the need to move beyond a "secular" realm that only admits one of those confessions.

categories, raising doubts that conflict and violence can be clearly as religious or secular as is commonly thought.

As a philosopher writing from a religious tradition and with the influence of postmodern thought, Smith's interrogates the concepts of the secular and religion throughout his work. His analysis challenges these categories and the theories which have sought to explain them. Yet Smith's also offers a *constructive* project that has potential application in the study of religious conflict. With this part of his work, he aims to provide theoretical tools which better explain religion and human social behavior than typical modern theories. With an improved understanding of what constitutes religion and drives human action, scholars could better able to analyze the relationship between religion and conflict. This theoretical frame could lead to fruitful research into how to address some of the practices and mechanisms by which people are recruited into extremists groups which commit acts of violence and terrorism. It could similarly point to ways of countering these trends, promoting dialogue and peace.

2. The Roots of the Secular

Introduction

What is the connection between secular political projects and the philosophical accounts of reality and knowledge that arose in modernity? In a book-length exposition of and engagement with the Radical Orthodoxy project, a theological school of thought associated with the scholar John Milbank,²⁵ Smith summarizes their “Story” of philosophy: “Behind the *politics* of modernity (liberal, secular) is an *epistemology* (autonomous reason), which is in turn undergirded by an *ontology* (univocity and the denial of participation).”²⁶ It is an axiom which Smith himself endorses and defends,²⁷ and which unpacks and interrogates using the tools of his theological and philosophical traditions. This is the first level of critique aimed at the secular, and it is expounded in the context of the political project of secularism. Section 2.1 examines Smith’s critique of the secular as an epistemic category (and as a metanarrative) and his constructive account of postmodern epistemology. Section 2.3 assesses his understanding of the ontology of the secular as disenchanted autonomy and his constructive account of reenchancement. Finally, section 2.4 will examine how these accounts of secular relate to the political project of secularism.

2.1. Epistemology of the Secular

“Behind the politics of modernity (liberal, secular) is an epistemology.”

In his writing on the secular, Smith distinguishes between the secular as an epistemic category and as a politics. The two are conceptually distinct but closely linked.²⁸ Smith

²⁵ Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1990) contains much of the critique that would come to characterize Radical Orthodoxy. Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock are also key figures who edited the first collection of essays with Milbank with such a title. See their *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999).

²⁶ James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 99-100. In his exposition of the theological school of thought (or possibly, as Smith notes, a “movement” or “sensitivity”), Smith expresses wide agreement, though with his own Reformational caveats.

²⁷ James K.A. Smith, “Secularity, Religion and the Politics of Ambiguity,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 6, no. 3, (Fall 2005), 117n3. This is a review of Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2003. Smith generalizes it here by noting that “a politics is rooted in an epistemology, which is in turn rooted in an ontology.” On this account, *no* politics can be without an epistemology or ontology, even if unarticulated.

²⁸ Note that the secular in both cases is being used in the sense of secular₂ as explained in the introduction.

suggests that secularism flows from secular epistemology—not necessarily chronologically, but conceptually. The epistemology is logically prior to the political doctrine of secularism. Smith says that “our epistemologies and attendant theologies spawn political agendas, even where such political implications are neither suggested nor glimpsed.”²⁹

According to a more traditional model as outlined by [John] Rawls or Charles Taylor, there is a close link between the [secular epistemic category and secularism] and their emergence alongside (or as the condition of) the modern nation-state: the secular denotes a mode of knowing which is neutral with respect to religious commitments or ‘visions of the good’ and thus open and common to all. ... Secularism is the doctrine that mandates that public discourse be conducted according to the neutral, non-religious standards of secular reason. ...[E]pistemology precedes (perhaps even entails) a distinct Enlightenment politics that continues to govern Europe.”³⁰ (italics mine)

As noted earlier, secularism is a word with several meanings. Slavica Jakelić has written that the word “may indicate a nonreligious worldview, an ideology, a political doctrine, a form of political governance, a type of moral philosophy, or a belief that the scientific method is solely sufficient to understand the world in which we live.”³¹ The secularism to which Smith refers is the political doctrine which takes a normative view against religion’s presence in the public sphere. For example, in Rawlsian public sphere, an individual abiding by the rules of secularism would not appeal to his or her “comprehensive doctrine” in debate but rather argue using a public reason accessible to all.³² Thus, the existence of a public reason, or a secular (i.e., non-religious) reason, is presupposed in a secularist political conception of the public sphere.

The connection between the adoption of a secular epistemology and the move to secularism is not, according to Smith, necessary. A secular epistemology makes possible the political doctrine, and “perhaps” makes it inevitable, though Smith doesn’t go far as to affirm this.³³ Conceptual priority, then, belongs to the epistemic category. But secularism is embedded in this epistemology, latent and available for unfolding, even if the politics are not explicitly stated. To understand the political agenda of secularism, therefore, Smith interrogates secular epistemology.

²⁹ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 50.

³⁰ Smith, “Secularity, Religion and the Politics of Ambiguity,” 117.

³¹ Slavica Jakelić, “Secularism,” in *Encyclopedia of Global Religion*, eds. Wade Clark Roof and Mark Juergensmeyer (London: SAGE Publications, 2012), 1142.

³² Although Rawls’ position on this changed over the years. He was particularly concerned about the limits of public reason on essential constitutional issues and questions of basic justice. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 214-215. The target of Smith’s critique would include Rawls but more broadly the cultural shifts

³³ But Smith will contend that Asad’s rejection of secular epistemology should accompany a rejection of secularism.

As noted in the axiom stated above, Smith argues that the secular as an epistemic category assumes an autonomous space of reason. In this secular space, “philosophical (or, more broadly, theoretical) thought operates on the basis of a ‘neutral’ system of rationality—one that is autonomous with respect to controlling factors such as tradition, religious belief, or other ‘prejudices.’”³⁴ Even though people may have traditions, beliefs, and prejudices, these can be “bracketed” to allow objective, universal reasoning untethered to the particularities of a subjective human experiences, identities, and communities. The bracketing allows thought to be radically free. Individual agents, liberated from authority structures (not just political, but social, philosophical, etc.) are able to think freely, their knowledge being bounded only by reason. Fundamentally, Smith sees this epistemological move as crucial to understanding modernity (and thus secularism), since the “core of modernity is the Enlightenment, and the heart of the Enlightenment is a ‘prejudice against prejudice.’”³⁵

In the philosophical terms, this theory of knowledge is called foundationalism. According to philosopher Robert Audi, the thesis of foundationalism is that “the structure of a body of knowledge... is foundational, where this is taken to imply that any indirect (hence non-foundational) knowledge there is depends on direct (and thus in a sense foundational) knowledge. The superstructure, one might say, rests on the foundations.”³⁶ The foundation must arise from certitude regarding the foundational belief. Audi notes that there are stronger (i.e., classical) and more moderate versions of foundationalism, with the latter allowing a broader account for how one acquires foundations for knowledge and justification.³⁷ Nevertheless, foundationalism as a whole has come under sustained critique over the last century.³⁸

³⁴ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 144.

³⁵ Ibid., 32. The “prejudice against prejudice” comes from Hans-Georg Gadamer’s concise summary of the Enlightenment project.

³⁶ Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A contemporary introduction to the theory of knowledge* (2nd ed., London: Routledge, 2003), 193-194.

³⁷ Audi says that moderate versions allow for “alternative kinds of foundational beliefs for different people and under different circumstances,” and leaves people open to the possibilities of mistakes. Thus, it avoids some of the dogmatism of stronger versions. See *ibid.*, 212-213.

³⁸ Olli-Pekka Vainio says that the twentieth century’s philosophical upheaval was an “epistemological revolution caused by the full-scale collapse of Cartesian foundationalism.” See *Beyond Fideism: Negotiable Religious Identities* (Farnham Burlington: Ashgate, 2010) 65. Duncan Pritchard summarizes the problems with foundationalism in *What Is This Thing Called Knowledge?* (2d ed., London: Routledge, 2010), 38: “Either we set the requirements on foundational beliefs quite high so that they are plausible, but then face the problem of explaining how such a narrow set of foundational beliefs can serve as a foundation for all the non-foundational beliefs; or else we set the requirements on foundational beliefs quite low, but then face the problem of explaining just why such beliefs should be treated as foundational at all.”

Smith's writing on the secular is in line with these critiques, such that he is confident claiming that foundationalism is a "no-longer-sustainable epistemology."³⁹

The secular view of epistemology, according to Smith, is itself a story, a *mythos*, a narrative, a faith about the nature of human rationality. Beyond mere reason, "what constitutes the autonomy of thought is determined by extra-theoretical commitments or presuppositions."⁴⁰ The secular has pre-theoretical starting points—presuppositions which cannot be rationally demonstrated, only assumed. Smith argues that these presuppositions qualify as religious. "All pretended autonomous accounts of human nature or social life are funded not only by biases or prejudices but also by religious, even quasi-theological, commitments."⁴¹ But what are these commitments, and what make them religious?

These commitments have gone by a number of names. Among the theologians and philosophers Smith cites are:

- "ground motives" in the work of Herman Dooyeweerd⁴²
- "worldviews" in the work of Abraham Kuyper⁴³
- "control beliefs" in the Reformed epistemology of Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga⁴⁴
- "paradigm" in the work of Thomas Kuhn⁴⁵
- "unthought" in the work of Michel Foucault⁴⁶

What gives these pretheoretical commitments their religious status, according to Smith, is their "ultimacy."⁴⁷ They are ultimate in the sense that they can only be taken on faith, with no possibility for rational demonstration.

³⁹ James K. A. Smith, "Secularity, Globalization, and the Re-enchantment of the World," *After Modernity?: Secularity, Globalization, and the Re-enchantment of the World*, ed. James K. A. Smith (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), 9.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 144. These presuppositions are called "ground-motives" of a worldview by Herman Dooyeweerd, a philosopher within Smith's own Reformational tradition. John Milbank uses the term "quasi-theologies" to describe the same faith-based views.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁴² The ground motives traced by Dooyeweerd include the following: the Greek form-matter motive; the scholastic nature-grace motive; and the humanistic nature-freedom motive. See Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Philosophical Thought*, ed. James K.A. Smith, *Collected Works*, B/4 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 29-36.

⁴³ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1943).

⁴⁴ Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

⁴⁵ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 70n15. Smith views a paradigm as "a background set of assumptions of what is taken for granted and thus *not* articulated or made explicit." See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), in which he argues that paradigms are "incommensurable," and humans are incapable of providing objective criteria by which to judge other competing paradigms. Paradigms are "how we perceive our world and what we consider knowledge and truth." See also Smith, "A Little Story About Metanarratives," 362.

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁷ This paragraph comes from Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 147n15.

Smith seems to be using “religious” here in two senses. A belief or a claim is religious in an *epistemic* sense if it is presupposed without argumentation, i.e. taken on faith (common examples cited in these discussions include the reliability of human sense perception, memory as foundations for knowledge, and the principle of induction, among others).⁴⁸ Note here that holding a belief taken on “faith” does not entail fideistic assertions whereby any belief can be justified and any claim can be made without substantiation.⁴⁹ But, in addition, a belief can also be religious in the sense of ultimate *commitment*. The connotations of the latter go beyond merely assenting to propositional content; rather, it is more of an existential identification (even if unarticulated), a commitment to a particular “comprehensive view” of the good, the adoption of a “myth.” Secular accounts of the autonomy of reason, Smith is saying, are ultimately a story with which people identify, to which they are committed *extra-theoretically*.

The main thrust of Smith’s point is not toward defining “religious” in the context of the epistemological issues. His aim is rather to show that *whatever* is meant by “religious” in many academic and popular discussions *also* applies to “secular” beliefs and theories of knowledge. A value, belief, or view of the good always includes some kind of faith-based assumption. This contention becomes important when the lexicon of this debate is transferred to the political sphere, for Smith holds that “secular” knowledge and reason is typically conferred a superior status to religious knowledge and reason. What is admissible in a secular public sphere hinges on this epistemic status of citizens’ beliefs.

2.1.1 The Secular as a Metanarrative

As already noted, Smith views the epistemology of the secular as story, a *mythos*. But there are ways in which the narrative assumed by the secular is different than other accounts of knowledge, and Smith explains this difference in his interaction with Jean-François Lyotard’s language of “metanarrative.”⁵⁰ Writing about the nature of metanarratives vis-a-vis postmodernism, Smith writes that “metanarratives are a distinctly modern phenomenon: they are stories which not only tell a grand story (since even premodern and tribal stories do this), but also claim to be able to legitimate the story and its claims by an appeal to universal

⁴⁸ And Smith believes that these kinds of beliefs are ultimately impossible to avoid.

⁴⁹ See Vainio, *Beyond Fideism*, 2-6 (and the rest of the book) for a discussion fideism.

⁵⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

Reason.”⁵¹ The “story” corresponds to knowledge people can legitimately claim to possess. So the legitimation of a story—in other words, of knowledge—is grounded by an autonomous sphere of reason. It is an appeal to something *outside* of the story. But, Smith, alluding to Wittgenstein, argues that this attempted legitimation is merely another language game: “The appeal to ‘Reason’ as the criterion for what constitutes knowledge is but one more language game among many, shaped by founding beliefs or commitments which determine what constitutes ‘knowledge’ within the game.”⁵² The claim is that it is impossible get outside of these language games, impossible for finite humans to escape their particularity and the intersubjectivity this entails. This problem of legitimation cannot be solved an “appeal to a higher court that would transcend a historical context or language game” as there is “no neutral observer nor ‘God’s-eye-view’ which can *legitimate* or *justify* one paradigm or moral language game above another.”⁵³ So even though the modern narrative claims to be the “game above all games,”⁵⁴ it is, according to Smith, just another myth.

Note that Smith is not using “myth” in the sense of “untrue.” It is not opposed to “fact.” Rather, he is using it in a “benign way as ‘orienting commitments’ or ‘fundamental beliefs.’ It makes no evaluation regarding the ‘truth’ or ‘falsity’ of such beliefs.”⁵⁵ Even to view “myth” in that light is already concede autonomous reason as the arbiter of knowledge. Smith claims that a myth or narrative is ultimately akin to a faith in that there is no outside source of legitimation, no universal appeal to be made. Even appeals to reason itself can only be self-referential: any legitimation of reason can only refer to itself, thus becoming circular and lacking external foundation. To ground reason itself, then, one can only appeal to faith (or the narrative/myth). In the end, myths are auto-legitimizing by necessity. It is built-in to the structure of knowledge itself, as it were. Smith isn’t saying that myths *should* be auto-legitimizing, but that they *cannot be otherwise*. And because this auto-legitimation can only occur within one’s language game, from the “authority” of a narrator and the “homogeneity of a ‘people,’” appealing to the rules of one’s own game does nothing to

⁵¹ See James K. A. Smith, “A Little Story About Metanarratives: Lyotard, Religion, and Postmodernism Revisited,” *Faith and Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2002),” 354.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 360.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 359. Smith notes Lyotard’s “narratives of legitimation” include the “humanistic metanarrative of emancipation (as found in Kant and Marx)” and the “life of the Spirit in German Idealism.” These are akin to the ground motives found in the work of Dooyewerd.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 366n48.

persuade a “people” of another game.⁵⁶ And secular reason is, despite its claim to the contrary, simply another game grounded in a narrative, a myth.

Following Lyotard, Smith writes that metanarratives should be viewed “as universal discourses of legitimation which mask their own particularity.” That is, they

deny their narrative ground even as they proceed upon it as a basis. In particular, we must note that the postmodern critique is not aimed at metanarratives because they are really grounded in narratives; on the contrary, the problem with metanarratives is that they do not own up to their own mythic ground. Postmodernism is not incredulity toward narrative or myth; on the contrary, it unveils that all knowledge is grounded in such.⁵⁷

By Smith’s account, then, the story told by secularism is equally as “religious” as those told by other faith traditions because it ultimately appeals a narrative (story, myth, etc.) to ground its knowledge. But this religious nature of the secular is not the issue. The problem is that knowledge sourced from other narratives is deemed inadmissible (for example, in academia or politics) *because* they are explicitly grounded in narrative. If secular epistemology’s grounding is unveiled as ultimately just as faith-based as all other religious worldviews, it loses its superior position as neutral arbiter of truth claims. It would thus be inconsistent to treat religious reasoning as inherently different from secular reasoning.

One response that is common to these kinds of post-foundationalist critiques of modern epistemology is to recognize the influence of culture and the well-known biases of human cognition, yet still assert the importance of seeking facts and objective truths. Some may point to, for example, the scientific method, peer-reviews, and other methods for minimizing the prejudices humans are known to carry into pursuits of knowledge. This is how Immanuel Kant sought to bridge the transcendental gap between phenomena (the perceived world) and noumena (the world as it really exists). While admitting the importance of these guardrails in mitigating against the most basic of observational fallacies and biases, Smith’s approach would assert that every presentation of facts is an interpretation—possibly true, but always an interpretation. The issue is not merely the difficulty of presenting objective knowledge, but rather the impossibility.

Importantly, Smith does not suggest that adherents of the modern epistemology undergirding secular reason must abandon their approach. If the postmodern critique is correct, it “does not demand that modern thought relinquish its faith (a modern gesture to be

⁵⁶ Ibid., 359.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 360.

sure), but to own up to it—to openly confess its *credo*.⁵⁸ Secular reason can continue, Smith says, but it must cease to demand that its approach be the *only* form permissible in the public square.

2.1.2. Postmodern Epistemology

The deconstructive approach to secular epistemology Smith couples with a constructive project. What he articulates is an explicitly postmodern perspective but it is important to note what kind of postmodernism Smith is *not* talking about. It is not only a deconstruction of modernity as has been done in the works of thinkers like Foucault and Derrida. More than simply deconstructing assumptions of how we know which are built-in to the secular, Smith attempts also to give a positive account of what counts as knowledge.

Perhaps the most important resource Smith's overall project—and his account of postmodern epistemology in particular—is Augustine. One prime reason this ancient source appears to play such a central role in Smith's work, and especially in his critique of the secular modernity, is due to the Bishop of Hippo's pre-modern framework. Augustine's thought had not yet been "contaminated by the invention of the secular," thus providing a worldview and language with which to articulate a *post*-secularism.⁵⁹ The cultural and political milieu of Augustine's context also reflects the West with its religious pluralism under a hegemonic power. Smith's third reason is that

the substance of Augustine's thought—in particular his epistemology, his cultural analysis, and his theological vision—resonates with the post-foundationalist project that rejects the autonomy of reason and hence also the autonomy of the sociopolitical sphere. In short, for Augustine there is no secular, non-religious sphere as construed by modernity, there is only paganism or true worship.⁶⁰

The postmodern epistemology Smith puts forward adopts the Augustinian notion of the primacy of faith in understanding (*credo ut intelligam*). Cartesian certainty is no longer required. It is an "epistemology which is attentive to the structural necessity of faith preceding reason, believing in order to understand."⁶¹ That is, reason and knowledge must be grounded by certain presuppositions from which human understanding can proceed. A postmodern approach to knowledge affirms what Smith calls this "Augustinian structure" in which it is

⁵⁸ Ibid., 362.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 46.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 47. Smith fundamentally disagrees with those who have thought of Augustine's a precursor to Descartes and other modern thinkers. Justifying this reading of Augustine isn't his core project, but he points to a work by Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁶¹ Smith, "A Little Story About Metanarratives," 362

recognized that “there are a plurality of faiths, as many as there are language games.”⁶² Rather than seeing all truth claims as relative in an absolute sense (a sort of relativism and, Smith argues, caricature of Derrida’s deconstruction), this Augustinian approach seeks to place all claims truth and knowledge on the same level, as it were. Instead of dividing knowledge into objective/subjective, secular/religious, faith-based/reason-based, it separates claims simply as true-false (or, in Augustine’s terms, “true religion” vs paganism). All narratives are interpretations, but Smith still believes there can be a “true” interpretation.

Having rejecting the possibility of a universal and neutral standard of reason, Smith wants to recognize and affirm the particularity of knowledge, that foundational elements of a worldview can never be rationally demonstrated. A story or narrative could only ever be grounded in itself—auto-legitimation. He sees this approach as broadly in line with critiques of Enlightenment rationality from Heidegger to Thomas Kuhn, all of whom is sees as inheritors to some extent of this Augustinian tradition. As examined above, Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* provides a prime example of how postmodern thought has approached questions of knowledge. Lyotard’s rejection of a scientific and universal way to legitimate knowledge of historical, traditioned, and particular situations and facts is precisely how Smith approaches the epistemology of the secular.

Several questions arise from Smith’s approach to knowledge. One concern is that humans appear trapped within their own traditions and historical situations. Wouldn’t dialogue and debate be pointless if we are all stuck in our own language games? Wouldn’t disagreements ultimately end in exasperation over the fact that opponents are simply *unable* to agree because of their presuppositions, which are just as “legitimate” as any other? How are discussions between religious communities and secular communities in the public sphere possible under such epistemic conditions?⁶³

Any consideration of these questions and of Smith’s postmodern critique and constructive project would require separating two issues. The first is whether or not his analysis of the epistemic situation is correct. The success of his critique of the secular and secularism hinges upon foundationalism being, as he argues, “no-longer sustainable.” If foundationalist theories of knowledge *have* withstood the assault of postmodern theorists in the twentieth century, then there is no need to consider further his critique of the secular

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ See Vainio’s *Beyond Fideism* for more on this problem in particular.

claims on the public sphere. If, as Smith says, modern epistemology is behind secular politics and forms its foundation, then a rejection of the postmodern critique means the secular remains intact. When it comes to religion and religious issues in the public realm, discussants simply rely upon the standard of a universal reason and scientific knowledge to arbitrate debates. For adherents to the modern distinction of faith and reason, it is Smith's postmodern approach to knowledge which fails to make his critique of the secular convincing. After all, he says himself that "what is at stake in postmodernism is *the relationship between faith and reason*" (emphasis original).⁶⁴

The second issue pertains the target of Smith's critique: to what extent is secularism as a political doctrine *actually* reliant upon the epistemology? In other words, could one hold to a post-foundationalist account of knowledge and still advocate secularism? Smith argues against such a possibility.⁶⁵ Indeed, it seems that if one accepts that the secular is necessarily tied to a universal, public reason, then the impetus for secularism collapses. This does not mean all versions of secularism crumble. Other possibilities will be explored later.

2.2. Ontology of the Secular

"Behind the politics of modernity (liberal, secular) is... an ontology."

According to the axiom stated above, the politics of the secular has an epistemology, and this is rooted in a particular understanding the nature of reality. Whereas pre-Enlightenment ontology had remained "open" to transcendence, the ontology of modernity was immanentized. The world became closed off from the transcendent and became a flat, autonomous system. Modern, secular people now live in the "immanent frame."⁶⁶

Common to a number of accounts which critique the secular is the location of a key ontological shift in the philosopher-theologian John Duns Scotus (1266–1308). While Smith is tracing this story through his engagement with Radical Orthodoxy, others dating back to the

⁶⁴ Smith, "A Little Story About Metanarratives," 361.

⁶⁵ See Smith, "Secularity, Religion and the Politics of Ambiguity."

⁶⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2007). Taylor's tome and its claim that we now inhabit the "immanent frame" led to the creation by the Social Science Research Council's creation of a website called "The Immanent Frame" devoted to the discussion of Taylor's tome and religion in the public sphere. Smith and Taylor have both published there. Important to Taylor's work is that attempt to understand what it "feels" like to inhabit a secular age and the "immanent frame," rather than deconstruct the propositional claims underwriting it. Radical Orthodoxy, by contrast, has a "genealogical" account of the secular, immanent frame and traces these shifts through their intellectual carriers. These are not necessarily at odds, but different ways of approaching the same phenomenon.

Nouvelle Théologie movement of the mid-twentieth century have offered similar Scotus-centered genealogical accounts of modernity.⁶⁷ The thesis is roughly this: Whereas Thomas Aquinas’s participatory metaphysics held that the world “is” only insofar as it “participates” in the transcendent (in Aquinas’s case, God), Scotus elevated “being” above transcendence. The material world thus becomes unhooked from its dependence on the transcendent, and “because being is ‘flattened,’ the world is freed to be an autonomous realm.”⁶⁸ Human beings were granted ontological independence—their “own subsistence and autonomy”⁶⁹—taken as autonomous units which could make observations about the world as if they were outside it. Naturalism would be a natural consequence of this shift, “just the kind of world that emerged after Scotus’s bifurcation of an ‘autonomous’ world, culminating in Kant.”⁷⁰

The ontological shift goes hand in hand with the epistemological shift. The “autonomous (and secular) metaphysics” of Scotus “treats finite creatures as wholly available for comprehension.”⁷¹ To put this in hermeneutical terms, humans now have full, immediate access to finite aspects of the world such that they can be certain of their knowledge about and interpretation of them. Smith’s writes that before the advent of modernity, humanity was “positioned within a hierarchy of forms (in which case we wouldn’t be surprised if ‘higher levels’ are mysterious and inscrutable),” but the shift to the immanent frame means “we now adopt a God-like, dispassionate ‘gaze’ that deigns to survey the whole.”⁷² The secular epistemic category is only possible within this flattened reality, unhooked and autonomous with respect to the transcendent. In modernity, the assumption is that the world can be understood neutrally, with no need to relate to transcendence. Now, whether or not Duns Scotus was such a primary source for secular ontology and modernity in general as Smith and

⁶⁷ The “Scotus Story” (as Michael Horton has called it) is found in other accounts. See, Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 25-73; Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁶⁸ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 97. So “both the Creator and the creature exist in the same way or in the same sense,” or what Radical Orthodoxy calls the “univocity of being.”

⁶⁹ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁰ James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 98.

⁷¹ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 98. This is what Derrida critiques as “presentism.”

⁷² James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 52.

Radical Orthodoxy thinkers suggest is disputed.⁷³ Even Charles Taylor, who finds much in agreement with this “Intellectual Deviation” story, finds it an incomplete explanation of modern secularity.⁷⁴ Yet the historicity of this account, while important, is less important than whether or not the intellectual shifts have indeed occurred. The latter is less in doubt.

The ontology emphasizing the autonomy of the material world was particularly significant in the development of modern science. Science, Smith says, is “governed by commitment to the regularities of cause-and-effect” and its “successes... have been the fruit of the predictive power of just such a ‘normal’ causal structure).”⁷⁵ But Smith’s contention is that this ontological shift toward a closed system was not simply a *finding* of science or of secular reason. The notion of a closed, immanent world is a metaphysical—i.e., not-scientific—claim, a philosophical presupposition. Smith affirms that “the regularity and (relative) constancy of natural processes,” necessary to use the scientific method, does not require this particular ontology. So though naturalism “claims that this must entail an understanding of nature as a closed system of laws, [] this is not a properly scientific (empirical) claim.”⁷⁶ Philosophy actually serves as the ground upon which the science (which Smith clearly endorses and celebrates) stands. But “science finds itself grounded in prior beliefs which do not admit of legitimation, but rather function as the basis for further legitimation.”⁷⁷ If secular epistemology is foundationalist, secular ontology *assumes* the legitimacy of philosophical naturalism in which only “natural” forces are thought to operate in the world.

According to Smith, naturalistic assumptions in the hard sciences (biology, chemistry, physics, etc.), while not necessary for scientific inquiry, have become dominant in the field. The “price of admission to science (and scientific respectability)” is “metaphysical naturalism, or at least ontological monism, coupled with rigid conceptions of the laws of

⁷³ See Richard Cross, “Duns Scotus and Suárez at the Origins of Modernity,” in *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth*, eds. Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 65-80.

⁷⁴ Taylor thinks the Reform Master Narrative was also necessary: “Reform demanded that everyone be a *real*, 100 percent Christian. Reform not only disenchant, but disciplines and re-orders life and society.” See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 773-74.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 94.

⁷⁶ James K. A. Smith, “Is the Universe Open for Surprise? Pentecostal Ontology and the Spirit of Naturalism,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 43, no. 4 (2008), 891. As the non-scientific nature of these ontological claims, Smith notes elsewhere as a problem of “legitimation”: “Whenever science attempts to legitimate itself, it is no longer scientific but narrative, appealing to an orienting myth which is not susceptible to scientific legitimation.” See Smith, “A Little Story About Metanarratives,” 359.

⁷⁷ Smith, “A Little Story About Metanarratives,” 361.

nature.”⁷⁸ Because nature is assumed to be autonomous, no outside (transcendent, supernatural) causal explanations are possible, so scientific methodology then becomes the way truth claims are adjudicated. Within the secular framework, “‘science’ is the primary authority and is the first to stipulate what could be theoretically acceptable” as it has made “‘first and preeminent claim to the territory.’”⁷⁹ When it comes to religious truth claims, the “‘natural sciences, then, are taken to be ‘objective’ arbiters of ‘the way things *really* are,’” such that religious communities are “‘expected to modify and conform (‘correlate’) [their] beliefs and practices to the dispensations of the scientific magisterium.”⁸⁰ Smith argues this ontology has become so dominant that those outside of hard sciences—and, most relevant to this discussion, theologians and religious thinkers—have felt obliged to join a correlationist project which requires conform to naturalistic, secular standards.⁸¹

But the ontology of the secular has not been confined to the hard sciences alone. Perhaps more importantly for an examination of secularism was the shift that occurred in secular social theoretical accounts of intersubjectivity. Smith argues that social ontology in modernity has adopted Thomas Hobbes’ state of nature as a “war of all against all,” or what Radical Orthodoxy calls the “ontology of violence.” The ontologically autonomous individual becomes the primary social unit, and social relations are assumed to be inherently violent and atomistic. This social ontology then becomes the basis for social, political, and economic theory in modernity and its “fruits:” the liberal nation-state and capitalism. And here is another point where the epistemology and ontology of the secular are interrelated. Smith writes that Hobbes believed the truth of his state of nature theory was “disclosed by mere reason,” but it “is unveiled as a particular interpretive decision or commitment, not the self-evident truth of a universal logic.”⁸² This presupposition, taken as self-evident, cannot be demonstrated. So just as secular epistemology *presupposes* an autonomous sphere of reason, immanent ontology *presupposes* a closed system of reality, neither of which are demonstrable. Both become axiomatic to theoretical thinking, fundamentally shaping secular social sciences and the possible political and social arrangements from which they result.

⁷⁸ Smith, “Is the Universe Open for Surprise?,” 892.

⁷⁹ Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 94.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁸¹ Ibid., 94. Smith cites Rudolf Bultmann, known for his “demythologization” of the New Testament, as a “classic case” of this. For an account of correlationism, see Vainio, *Beyond Fideism*, Ch. 3, 77-127.

⁸² Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 145.

2.2.1. Disenchantment to Reenchantment

A word commonly used to summarize the ontology undergirding secular modernity is “disenchantment.”⁸³ Disenchantment, Smith says, is a story about the nature of reality, but it refuses to acknowledge its contestability, just as the epistemology of autonomous reason does.

Despite its over-reaching claims to be ‘value-free’ description of ‘the way things are,’ the secularist disenchantment of the world is a particular narration of the world that is contestable. In other words, the secular story about the world and human beings, and our relationships is just that: a story.”⁸⁴

Smith doesn’t want to allow this secular story claim that it is *not* a narrative like other worldviews. Yet there is a constructive project here: “to counter the politics and epistemology of secular modernity, it is necessary to subject its *ontology* to critique (and unveil its status as a *mythos*), then articulate the only counter-ontology that is able to do justice to materiality and embodiment as such.”⁸⁵ Smith’s claim is that the disenchanted ontology of the secular does not do justice to the observed data. The phenomena of the material and of humanity’s embodied experience, Smith believes, are better explained by their “participation” with transcendence. “The key here is that this dynamic, participatory ontology refuses the static ontologies that presume the autonomy of nature.”⁸⁶ Smith rejects the dualism present in the natural/supernatural divisions characteristic of modernity (present in both secular *and* religious accounts).

The project could be summarized as a “reenchantment,” which Smith says “requires a kind of theorizing that is imaginative which is not constrained by the rules and regulations imposed by the ‘plausibility structures’ of secular modernity (which are themselves relative).”

⁸⁷ It affirms transcendence and immanence, but rejects the latter’s autonomy and affirms a subordination/dependency on the former. This counter-ontology, while self-consciously part of the Christian tradition, would also find allies other “religious” articulations that reject the secular. So while Smith describes this as a “creational ontology,” or “a philosophy of immanence that affirms the materiality of creation at the same time that it affirms the Creator,”⁸⁸ other traditions which eschew the dualism assumed by secular ontology and affirm a dependence of the material on the transcendent may find much agreement here.

⁸³ Max Weber is provided early analysis of the “disenchantment” of the modern world.

⁸⁴ Smith, “Secularity, Globalization, and the Re-enchantment of the World,” 11.

⁸⁵ Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 101.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸⁷ Smith, “Secularity, Globalization, and the Re-enchantment of the World,” 11.

⁸⁸ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 222.

Relating epistemology and ontology, there does seem to be a correlation between the foundationalist accounts of knowledge and the immanentized ontology of the secular. The extent to which these shifts are tied to Duns Scotus is debatable, but Smith's interaction with Radical Orthodoxy's story of Scotus' role in modernity does shed light on how the roots may have developed. The emphasis found in modernity on individual autonomy has undoubtedly shaped political, social, and economic theory. Recognizing the extent to which those theories themselves rely on a particular tradition, a view of social ontology which assumes autonomous units, would also require questioning the epistemology of autonomous reason they entail.

The result of reenchancement seems to be that, for social theorizing, more weight would go to collectivities than to individuals in explaining subjectivity, hermeneutics, social rationality and the like. It seems this already exists to some degree among communitarian thinkers like Charles Taylor or Alasdair MacIntyre who are, like Smith, critical of the secular. Perhaps when he suggests "imaginative" theorizing Smith is thinking of something beyond this school of thought, but there is no clear indication of what that might entail.

It is clear that a closed, immanent system is not necessary for the predictive power of the scientific method to work—the presence and prominence of openly religious scientists certainly suggests as much. But reenchancement would imply to some degree a demotion from science's status as the objective standard which arbitrates truth. As a methodology for finding and explaining "natural" causes and phenomena, it simply is not equipped to answer questions outside that framework, or to prove the validity of the framework itself. It is not evident, however, to what extent a reenchanted ontology would change the methodology of hard sciences, especially if some scientists already to some degree hold to it. What would a looser conception of the laws of nature entail? If the regularity of nature is assumed in both enchanted and disenchanted ontologies, how does reenchancement bring new elements into science? This part of Smith's account needs expansion and examples as its applicability is unclear. The political and social implications for moving beyond secular epistemology and ontology, however, are more evident. They will be addressed in a later chapter.

2.2.2. Sources beyond the Enlightenment

While Smith repeatedly points to the Enlightenment as the source of secular epistemology and ontology, he acknowledges the debt owed to other traditions. As noted above, Duns Scotus,

the medieval philosopher-theologian, played a significant role in synthesizing and articulating a notion of autonomy accorded to the material world. He predated the Enlightenment by several centuries. Following Taylor, Smith notes that “philosophical accounts of modernity... tend to have an epistemological fixation that seizes upon the Enlightenment as the center of the story.” To add nuance to this picture, Smith notes that new perspectives on art contributed to secular ontology. While it has once been “embroiled with the religious and the political,” the Renaissance and Romanticism “disembedded” art so that it “emerge[s] as an autonomous entity and institution.” In modernity, the “aesthetic aspect is distilled and disclosed for its own sake and as the object of interest” and art becomes “a cultural phenomenon and an autonomous reality.” Instead of pointing to a transcendent reality and being embedded in the institutions mediating transcendence, art ceases to refer to anything outside itself. “This was necessary precisely because the flattening of the world meant the loss of reference.”⁸⁹ The picture painted here of the emergence of the secular is thus more complicated than a mere intellectual shift. Broader cultural forces are acknowledged.

Epistemological sources of the secular outside of the Enlightenment are also noted. Interestingly, Smith identifies Thomas Aquinas’ notion of “natural reason”⁹⁰ as an epistemological forerunner to secular reason, a typical perspective among Reformed philosophers. Here, Smith differs with Radical Orthodoxy thinkers, who interpret Aquinas’ nature not as a neutral realm but as a “originally graced.”⁹¹ Yet even Duns Scotus’ thought was within the Christian tradition, demonstrating that Smith’s understanding of the secular goes beyond critiques of modern sources. Enlightenment thought was simply an intensified and ultimately dominant perspective and project. If this account is correct, a number of implications are of interest. Firstly, the supposed tension between and challenges of relating the secular and the religious that emerged have taken place *within* Christendom; i.e., it is not necessarily a contest between the religious and the non-religious, or even between religions. One tradition has produced the tension. Secondly, if art has been a source of the secular, then seeking to negotiate secular/religious tensions predominantly through philosophical analysis may not be adequate. Intellectual engagement with other cultural (re)sources may be necessary.

⁸⁹ This paragraph is from Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 74-75.

⁹⁰ Highlighting the difference with Augustine, Smith points to Aquinas’ commentary on Boethius’ *De trinitate*, Q. 1, art. 1. See Smith, “A Little Story About Metanarratives,” 368n63.

⁹¹ See Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 120-122.

2.3. *The (Religious) Politics of the Secular*

As already noted, there are multiple versions of political doctrine of secularism. Smith is not a critic of every stripe which falls under the name. Those which advocate institutional separation in society—political structures like the state acting independently of churches, mosques, and synagogues—fall into Smith’s taxonomy of secularism₁, and this he supports.⁹² Nor would every kind of religious engagement in the public sphere which challenges secularism₂ be appropriate or coherent. Smith is openly critical of Constantinian approaches from religious groups (particularly the Religious Right of the United States), which have “sought to colonize the public and political spheres by Christian morality (or the morality disclosed supposedly disclosed by ‘natural law’).”⁹³ In fact, these sorts of triumphalistic postures, Smith says, are operating out of essentially the same modern framework and epistemology as the type of secularism Smith opposes.⁹⁴

The secularism which is the object of Smith’s critique, and which assumes the epistemology and ontology outlined above, is that which seeks to “carve out ‘the secular’—a zone decontaminated of the prejudices of determinate religious influences.” The project, which has progressed more in Europe but is present in North America, aims to “neutralize the public sphere, hoping to keep this pristine space unpolluted by the prejudices of concrete religious faith.”⁹⁵ There are different manifestations of this normative view: the academic arguments in political philosophy, and the more popular versions articulated in the media and by politicians, pundits and cultural commentators. But whether the theory of Rawls or the French tradition of *laïcité*, the concern here is that a secularism of the harsher stripes would hinder what Smith calls “confessional plurality,” which he sees as an aspiration in a religiously, politically, and ethnically diverse society.⁹⁶ Confessional plurality refers

⁹² This separation is central to the “sphere sovereignty” advocated by Abraham Kuyper and Smith’s Reformed tradition. See James K.A. Smith, “Worldview, Sphere Sovereignty, and Desiring the Kingdom: A Guide for (Perplexed) Reformed Folk,” *Pro Rege* 39, no. 4 (2011), 15-24. Smith also appears to approvingly cite Graham Ward who “does not endorse ‘outright condemnations of secularism or modernity or liberalism.’ Rather, he concedes that ‘in certain countries in the world a good dose of secularism would break the repressive holds certain state-ratified religions have over people’s lives.’” See Smith, “Secularity, Religion and the Politics of Ambiguity,” 116n2 citing Graham Ward, *True Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), ix, 1.

⁹³ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 32.

⁹⁴ One might also add that Constantinian approaches perpetuate discourse (and policy) which contribute to religious conflict, particularly when it comes to Western policy in the Islamic world.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9. In important question regarding a confessional plurality in the public sphere is over what can be considered “public.” The most prominent twentieth-century theorizer of the public sphere was Jurgen Habermas, but Smith points to a brief description by sociologist Christian Smith to summarize his own view: “those fields of social life in which culturally different groups of people must live together with common

specifically to the presence of religious groups in the public sphere which contribute *from* their own tradition, articulating the political implications of their faiths.⁹⁷

The liberal political tradition's focus on the individual (autonomous) subject is what closely ties it to the project of the secular. Connecting the two, Smith writes that secularism is "rooted in a deeply liberal suspicion regarding the purported dangers of determinate religious confession, to which their response is the advocacy of an autonomous reason and an autonomous individual subject, endowed with certain inalienable rights."⁹⁸ The liberal account of the subject aligns with that proposed by a secularist, which is why Smith argues that secularism will "almost always be in allegiance with classical liberal polity."⁹⁹ Because of liberalism's emphasis on individual subjects' rights, the problem of what to do with cultural and religious diversity gets solved mainly by pushing such particularities to the private sphere. José Casanova, a sociologist of religion, summarizes this tension between liberalism and particular religious traditions in what he calls the "secularist paradox." "[I]n the name of freedom, individual autonomy, tolerance, and cultural pluralism, religious people—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim—are being asked to keep their religious beliefs, identities, and norms 'private' so that they do not disturb the project of a modern, secular, enlightened Europe."¹⁰⁰ Nicholas Wolterstorff, a defender of liberal democracy, seeks to distinguish liberal polities from liberal theory, proposing that the political structure of liberal societies *are* worthy of the support of people seeking a "religiously integrated existence."¹⁰¹ Yet Wolterstorff is also critical of liberal *theory's* (i.e., liberalism) approach to religion as articulated by Robert Audi and John Rawls.¹⁰² Smith's claim here is that it is the *theory* of liberalism (and certain

normative and institutional arrangements that govern or influence important dimensions of their lives. These include the areas of law, education, science, medicine, the mass media, and so on." See Christian Smith, ed., *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), vii. Cited in Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 33.

⁹⁷ A prime example of shutting down confessional plurality is France. During the debates on the display of religious symbols in public schools, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin said, "Religion cannot be a political project," and that the veil had taken on political meaning. See Elaine Sciolino, "Debate Begins In France On Religion In the Schools," *The New York Times*, February 4, 2004.

⁹⁸ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 60.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁰⁰ José Casanova, "Religion, European secular identities, and European integration," in *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, eds. Timothy Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 66-67.

¹⁰¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff and Terence Cuneo, *Understanding Liberal Democracy: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 296. For more on Wolterstorff's understanding of religion in liberal democracy, see Ch. 11, "Why Can't We All Just Get Along With Each Other?" and Ch. 13, "Do Christians Have Good Reasons for Supporting Liberal Democracy?"

¹⁰² See Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

manifestations in practice) which misunderstands the nature of confessional and cultural plurality.

Contra Rawls, Smith believes liberalism is not simply a political conception of justice without any metaphysical or epistemological assumptions. He writes that the principles of liberalism “are not simply self-evident or just there to be perceived by neutral, dispassionate observers; rather, they grow out of an orienting narrative, a distinct tradition of thought which fosters a particular set of practices.”¹⁰³ The fact that liberal democracy *is* a tradition, just like the religious confessions whose public presence it seeks to limit, is precisely what it advocates tend—indeed, must, by virtue of their argument—to deny.¹⁰⁴ Liberalism, Smith writes, is a

worldview that prioritizes individual freedom and thus values autonomy as a fundamental value. Beginning with this creedal commitment to individual freedom as ‘the Good,’ liberalism entails both political autonomy (rights and freedoms only constrained by the rights and freedoms of others) and epistemological autonomy (neutral, secular reason unconstrained by nonrational commitments).¹⁰⁵

Smith continues: “if one can see that liberalism, as an orienting ideology, is grounded in myths which have a religious epistemic status, then it seems to me that one could legitimately describe liberalism—and its attendant doctrines, such as secularism—as *religious*” (emphasis original).¹⁰⁶ The irony for Smith is that secularism itself has turned into a sort of covert religion which “passes itself off as ‘rational’ and therefore ir-religious, making its religious colonization of the public sphere submerged yet powerful.”¹⁰⁷ What governs the public sphere, then, is a religious point of view which doesn’t consider itself religious. Smith says that “this notion of the secular is a theocracy without god.”¹⁰⁸

The argument for the religious nature of liberalism (and thus secularism) is again based on the mythic nature of its grounding. Reference to liberalism’s commitments as “creedal” indicates this argument hinges upon the “epistemic status of liberal discourse and practice.”¹⁰⁹ That is, the belief in individual freedom as the good to be sought above all others within a political community cannot be rationally demonstrated. But Smith adds another indication of how liberalism could be conceived of as religious: “its articulation of a unique orienting *telos*.”¹¹⁰ That is, the epistemic status of the doctrines of liberalism (and

¹⁰³ Smith, “Secularity, Religion and the Politics of Ambiguity,” 120-121.

¹⁰⁴ This is the burden of Jeffrey Stout’s *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁵ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 60n113.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, “Secularity, Religion and the Politics of Ambiguity,” 120.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

secularism)—examined above—is coupled with an orientation towards some *telos*, an end or goal to which the discourse and practice is aimed. The *telos* of our political and cultural practices are precisely the thread Smith picks up in other works and orients his framework for thinking about religion. That is the subject of the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter was a systematic examination of James K. A. Smith's deconstruction of the epistemology and ontology of the secular. Through an interrogation of these concepts, it was found that the political doctrine and project of secularism has roots in the foundationalist epistemology of universal, autonomous reason birthed in the Enlightenment. Next, Smith's account of postmodern epistemology was found to be a challenge to the status accorded secular knowledge, calling into question the coherence of a secular public sphere. Secular epistemology, in turn, was found also to be closely related to a changing understanding of the nature of reality as a closed, autonomous system which can be accessed without reference to transcendence. This ontology gives secular theorizing and science an unwarranted privileged epistemic status. The sources for the secular were also found to be more than simply the Enlightenment, suggesting a broader cultural analysis of the secular/religious divide is needed. Finally, an examination of Smith's understanding of secularism showed he finds it intimately tied to liberalism's faulty notion of the nature of the subject and that its orienting *telos* of individual freedom is the Good is not religiously neutral.

3. Philosophical Anthropology of Religion and the Secular

Introduction

This introductory section explains how Smith moves from his critique of secular epistemology and ontology to philosophical anthropology in his interrogation of the modern understanding of religion and the secular. Section 3.1 looks at how Smith's analysis of modern anthropology challenges contemporary methods in the study of religion in sociology and philosophy. Section 3.2 assesses the alternative model Smith proposes. Section 3.3 examines how this model challenges modern notions of religion and secularity. Section 3.4 offers an overall assessment of Smith model as a framework for analyzing religion and offers points where his analysis could be strengthened.

The previous chapter was a critical examination of Smith's account of the epistemology and ontology which provide the foundation for the secular. His account says that while the secular claims for itself an autonomous and universally accessible reason, it is actually itself a narrative dependent on tradition and faith assumptions as much as any religion. Smith argues that the secular relies on an account of knowledge and reality which is not simply a neutral approach to the "way things are." The account is ultimately a story which, like all stories, cannot claim any outside legitimation but must be taken on faith. At the level of worldview or comprehensive doctrine, there is no division between faith-based or reason-based legitimation. Every view "operates on the basis of *faith*," because "thought is not a neutral, objective activity but rather a particular way of seeing the world that is itself based on prior faith or trust."¹¹¹ In the final analysis, then, Smith would say that even adherents to secularism have faith.

The account of modern epistemology and ontology is the first stage of Smith's critique of the secular. Whereas the secular assumes humans to be rational "thinkers," the faith required of all worldviews would mean a more apt description of humans would be "believers":

Our primordial orientation or comportment to the world is not as thinkers but as believers. Beliefs, we might say, are more "basic" than ideas. In this alternative anthropology, human persons are understood not as fundamentally thinking machines but rather as believing animals, or essentially religious creatures, defined by a worldview that is pre-rational or supra-rational.... This moves the essence of the

¹¹¹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 43.

humans person from the more abstract, disembodied world of ideas to a prerational level of commitments that are more ingrained in the human person.¹¹²

While Smith holds to the validity of this analysis, his view is that it is insufficient. The account needs to be radicalized, as it does not go far enough. In Smith's Cultural Liturgies project,¹¹³ he argues that the problem with this approach to "worldviews" is that it *still* fails to grasp what kind of beings humans are—in other words, it is operating with a faulty philosophical anthropology.¹¹⁴ The "believer" model of the human person is still governed by the modern emphasis on the cognitive and "seems just to move the clash of ideas down a level to a clash of beliefs."¹¹⁵ Propositions are still the focus, and Smith wonders if this "(merely semantic) shift really honor[s] the richness of the human person."¹¹⁶ He claims the person-as-believer anthropology is too disembodied and individualistic, creating a reductionistic account of humans. So while the postmodern critique of the secular focuses on the epistemology and ontology it assumes, it does not question the anthropological accounts that attended these shifts.

3.1. The Religion of Philosophy and Sociology

In his challenging of the modern understanding of religion and the secular, Smith applies his critique to two disciplines within the study of religion: philosophy and sociology. The academic the study of religion, as many fields, faces the perennial challenge of defining its object of study. Jonathan Z. Smith (no relation), though already noted as a critic of essentialized notions of the category of phenomena deemed "religion," nevertheless recognizes that the difficulty of the challenge does not negate the importance of attempts to meet it. He says that religion is a "second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as 'language' plays in linguistics or 'culture' plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Smith's Cultural Liturgies trilogy includes *Desiring the Kingdom*, *Imagining the Kingdom*, and *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017). The final volume was unpublished and thus unavailable during the writing this thesis.

¹¹⁴ A philosophical anthropology is an "attempt to provide a unified account of the meaning of the human being." See Zachary Davis and Anthony Steinbock, "Max Scheler," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/scheler>>. Any mention of "anthropology" in this paper refers to it this "philosophical" sense.

¹¹⁵ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 44.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

horizon.”¹¹⁷ (James K. A.) Smith would certainly agree, and this section will examine his attempt to improve that disciplinary horizon.

The philosophy of religion experienced somewhat of a renaissance in twentieth century which increasingly saw religion as a legitimate object and starting place for philosophy. Arguments for and against the rationality of religious belief, the nature of good and evil, and the relationship of science and religion are sample of the kind of topics explored in the field. Smith’s primary concern with the discipline is that the religion which philosophers examine is primarily the propositional content, such that the field “tends to reflect a working (or at least functional) assumption that doctrine is prior to liturgy, and thus ideas and propositions trump practices.”¹¹⁸ Questions about the epistemic validity of religious beliefs or of particular doctrines are not off limits, Smith would say, but these are not the core of religion.

A formative and usually central aspect of that form of life—across religious traditions—is participation in corporate worship, liturgical practices, and other forms of shared spiritual disciplines. In other words, believers tend to focus on faith as a way of life ('what we do') whereas contemporary philosophy of religion tends to treat faith as a way of thinking ('what we believe').¹¹⁹

Already it is clear that Smith has qualms with the notion of religion as primarily about holding certain beliefs, as such a starting point affects the method and practice of the discipline. For philosophers to do justice the subject of religion, then, the lived experiences and practices of “believers” themselves must somehow be explored with greater priority.¹²⁰

In the field of sociology, there are two general approaches that have come down from two founding fathers of the field Max Weber and Émile Durkheim. Broadly speaking, the substantivist approach, associated with Weber, attempts to say what religion *is*. It views religion primarily through its content—beliefs about God or the supernatural. The functionalist approach, associated with Durkheim, attempts to say what religion *does*. It studies the social function of religion without reference to the supernatural.

Substantivist and functionalist approaches each have problems, as sociologists of religion are well aware. For a substantivist, the difficulty lies in the ambiguity of defining the

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 281-282.

¹¹⁸ James K. A. Smith, “Philosophy of Religion Takes Practice: Liturgy as Source and Method in Philosophy of Religion,” in *Contemporary Method and Practice in the Philosophy of Religion*, eds. David Cheetham and Rolfe King (London: Continuum, 2008), 136.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ While philosophy may be more guilty of this than other disciplines, sociologists have attempted to understand religion through practices, particularly in the school known as “lived religion.” While there are important overlaps with that school and Smith’s project, there are differences which will be addressed below.

supernatural or transcendent, especially in the study of non-Western religions. For example, if reference to the supernatural is the standard, Confucianism and other traditions commonly considered religions could be excluded. This indicates a lacuna in the Western approach that could be evidence a certain ethno-centrism to this way of approaching phenomena associated religion.¹²¹ For a functionalist, nearly every kind of social set of practices and systems could count as religion, making the approach too inclusivist to give the designation of “religious” significant analytical value. The inclusivity of this approach would prove problematic for measuring the levels of religiosity of a given society. The sociology of religion in the West has by-and-large favored, despite its problems, the substantivist definition, because of a lack of any clear alternatives. As prominent sociologist of religion Grace Davie has written, “Once the gold standard, in the form of the supernatural, has been abandoned, it is very difficult to draw any precise or undisputed boundary about what should or should not be included in the sociological study of religion.”¹²² Both philosophy and sociology, then, operate with similar working definitions of religion, focusing on the beliefs and/about the supernatural.¹²³

All of these modern approaches to the study of religion, Smith argues, view the human subject through an overly “intellectualist” lens. To view religiosity this way is to “impose on religion a picture of human persons that reflects a distinctly modern emphasis on the cognitive—a top-heavy emphasis on beliefs, ideas, and doctrines.”¹²⁴ Smith finds an emblem of this shift to the cognitive in René Descartes’ maxim in *Meditations*: “I think, therefore I am.”¹²⁵ This, Smith says, is indicative of the quintessentially modern philosopher’s belief that not only could he be certain of his existence—“I am”—but that he could say *what* he fundamentally was: a “thinking thing.”¹²⁶ Elements of this account of the human can be traced back even further to Greek philosophy, and would be carried through the Enlightenment—especially Kant—into the present. But the contention is that this “Cartesian

¹²¹ Or, more radically and as noted in my introduction, modern notion of “religion” could itself be evidence of ethnocentrism.

¹²² Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion: A Critical Agenda* (2nd ed., London: SAGE, 2013), 20.

¹²³ For a lucid discussion of the issues with substantivist and functionalist (“culturalist”), see William Arnal and Russell McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of "Religion"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23-27.

¹²⁴ Smith, “Secular Liturgies and the Prospects for a ‘Post-Secular’ Sociology of Religion,” in *The Post-Secular in Question*, eds. Philip Gorski et al., (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 161.

¹²⁵ Whether or not Descartes’ maxim was the fundamental shift in modern accounts of the human is not the primary issue here. Like Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*, Smith’s interest is more engaging implicit assumptions in shifting cultural narratives that are only occasionally articulated—such as in *Meditations*.

¹²⁶ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 74.

model of the human person,” which assumes that the “heady realm of ideas and beliefs is the core of our being,” became dominant in modernity and the study of religion.¹²⁷

If a modern, cognitivist anthropology is assumed in philosophy and sociology’s approach to religion, how would this affect their methods and objects of inquiry? Smith argues that these approaches would begin with a “stunted” picture of the human being. He offers a few thought experiments to explain:

Imagine a world of unspeakable cruelty and the degradation of the human race to a cannibalistic war of all with all. Would that be a “secular” world? When humanity is reduced to “bare life” (Agamben), exposed and vulnerable and just fixated on the quotidian task of surviving—reduced to animality—is humanity then reduced to something less than religious?¹²⁸

Another runs as follows:

Imagine the whole world looked like the Upper West Side... like the enclaves of what Peter Berger calls a “globalized elite culture.” ... Would “religion” survive that annihilation/transformation? Would the global triumph of secularism—in which everyone reflected the ideal, cultivated, “secular” citizen—signal the obliteration of religion?¹²⁹

Based on the modern categories of the religious and the secular, Smith says that these questions would “yield predictable answers.”¹³⁰ Religion *would* seem to disappear in a world where the daily tasks which ensure survival—procuring food/water, self-defense, sleep—occupy all of humanity’s time, or where all people adopt a secular cosmopolitan culture. Why would this be? Operating with a cognitivist anthropology, the first thought experiment points to a clear loss of religion because the “animality” of merely surviving is something done by all sentient beings, and religion is allegedly a specifically human phenomenon. Similarly, a secular citizen’s beliefs (or lack of them) are primarily what determines their secularity. The religion examined by sociology, philosophy, and often theology, Smith claims, “is a religion for disembodied minds. It is a religion of ‘beliefs’ and ‘values,’ of representations, the stuff of minds and souls.”¹³¹

An important distinction must be made here. Smith is *not* simply saying that the study of religion needs to shift its focus from the beliefs to the practices and lived experiences of

¹²⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 76. Smith actually notes (43–46) two related models: The Human Person as Thinker and as Believer. The latter model contests the secular epistemology assumed in the former, and this will be taken up in a later chapter.

¹²⁸ Smith, “Secular Liturgies,” 160.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 160. Compare with Saba Mahmood’s claim that the U.S. State Department and Muslim reformers assume a “secularized conception of religion in which religion is understood to be an abstracted category of beliefs and doctrines from which the individual believer stands apart to examine, compare, and evaluate its various manifestations.” See Saba Mahmood, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” *Public Culture* 18 (2006): 341.

religious people—though, particularly with the case of philosophy, he certainly encourages this. Anthropologists have long considered lived and visible forms of religion in their work, and sociologists have as well. Rather, his critique goes down one level. His claim is that both philosophy and sociology must reconsider *which* practices and lived experiences should be considered religious. His target is the theoretical toolbox. In the previous chapter, it was shown that Smith’s understanding of epistemology is such that beliefs are ultimately grounded in faith (myths, stories whose grounding cannot be rationally demonstrated), making all worldviews ultimately religious. But in addition, Smith suggests scholars must give more attention to religious practice, and specifically *how* to determine whether not a practice is religious. Association with one’s belief and worship of a supernatural being is insufficient in Smith’s view. There is significant overlap between Smith approach and the functionalists, but with added nuance that will be explored in this chapter.

The central question Smith is asking is this: Are beliefs and ideas the primary manner in which to consider something or someone as religious or secular? If so, why? If not, what *should* be the criteria? In his work, Smith maintains that there is strong connection between how one studies religion with one’s “theory” of human beings. Theories are meant to account for observable phenomena. A philosophical anthropology, as a theory of what human beings are, thus must help explain phenomena observed in human activity. Looking at the phenomena of “human social behavior,” Smith claims that the cognitivist model which allegedly underpins modern understandings of religion is “inadequate not just because it is secular but because it can’t do justice to the data.”¹³² Why do human beings act the way they do? What motivates their behaviour? Are people driven by the beliefs of their religion and ideology to act a certain way? Do people with religious beliefs act differently than those with secular beliefs? Do different religious beliefs lead to different behaviours? These are the kinds of question which flow from Smith’s challenging of the cognitivist anthropology.

The problem which Smith sets up and seeks to solve—the difficulty of explaining human behavior with current understandings of religion and philosophical anthropology—is undoubtedly present. The scientific study of religion has suffered from what sociologist Mark Chaves calls the religious congruence fallacy.¹³³ In brief, while much of scholarly and popular discussions of religion assume a consistency between religious ideas and behavior, decades of

¹³² Smith, “Secular Liturgies,” 181-182n28.

¹³³ Mark Chaves, “SSSR Presidential Address Rain Dances in the Dry Season: Overcoming the Religious Congruence Fallacy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 1 (2010): 1–14.

research across multiple disciplines indicate that this is in fact the exception, not the rule. A simple example Chaves cites is a religious gathering in which people emphasize loving one another, only to act harshly towards one another outside of the gathering.¹³⁴ Because it is rare to be able to predict behaviour based on religious beliefs, there must be other more significant factors driving actions. This fact alone indicates the need for better theory.

But the issue of congruence raises another question: if religious congruence is rare, is there any reason to think that secular congruence is common? The ubiquity of religious incongruence points to a more fundamental discontinuity between belief and behavior; namely, that all cultures and worldviews—religious or not—are subject to the same problem. As Chaves notes, “ideas and practices exist as bits and pieces that come and go as situations change, producing many inconsistencies and discrepancies. This is true of culture in general, and it is true of religious culture in particular.”¹³⁵ If this problem of incongruence applies to religious and secular cultures alike, then studies of either which *assume* congruence and maintain a conceptual separation by focusing on beliefs may be misleading. One could maintain the “gold standard” of supernatural in a definition of religion for lack of alternatives, but if it fails to explain religious or secular behavior, perhaps more efforts at seeking such an alternative are to be sought. Smith is starting from this understanding: that religious beliefs and practices often don’t match. And he thinks the cognitivist anthropology assumed the study of religion fails to explain why that is the case.

To explain why he believes modern theories of religion cannot adequately explain the human behavior, Smith alleges two reductionistic assumptions: the modern model is too narrow and too static. It is narrow in that it considers one aspect of human beings—beliefs—to be the most significant factor in determining religiosity. And other aspects are left under-explored and their significance under-appreciated: “[N]oncognitive ways of being-in-the-world that are more closely tethered to our embodiment or animality... tend to drop of the radar or are treated as nonessential.” The model is static in that it suppose that humans can be “captured in a snapshot.” Human temporality loses its importance, and we are viewed “as creatures without histories, without any sense of unfolding and development over time.”¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Ibid., 4. Others, perhaps more illuminating, are found in his article.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁶ This paragraph follows Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 46-47. Compare again with Mahmood, who claims that in secularist approaches, “religion’s phenomenal forms—its liturgies, rituals, and scriptures—are

To review, Smith claims that the methodologies of philosophy and sociology of religion have are faulty due to their philosophical anthropology which focuses on the cognitive. Philosophy fails to adequately consider religion as a lived experience, and sociology's substantivism relies on the ambiguous category of the supernatural.¹³⁷ A major part of Smith's Cultural Liturgies project is to provide a new framework through which to look at religion by offering an alternative anthropology which seeks to displace intellectual beliefs as the core of the human person. His approach is heavily influenced by the phenomenological tradition: Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Charles Taylor and others who prioritize embodied experiences to understand, as Smith says, "human being-in-the-world." As with any theory, for it displace current theories, it should have more explanatory power than other models. What follows is an exposition and assessment of this theory.

3.2. Homo liturgicus, or the Human as Lover

At the heart of Smith's anthropological account is the claim that the core of human beings is not the propositional content contained in their heads, but their embodied *desire*. That is, while modern and secular accounts place more emphasis on what humans *think*, Smith claims that humans are better defined by what they *love*.¹³⁸ What he articulates throughout his book *Desiring the Kingdom* is a "more holistic, affective, embodied anthropology."¹³⁹

This Augustinian¹⁴⁰ model that resists the rationalism and quasi-rationalism of the earlier models by shifting the center of gravity of human identity, as it were, down from the heady regions of the mind closer to the central regions of our bodies, in particular, our *kardia*—our gut or heart. The point is to emphasize that the way we inhabit the world is not primarily as thinkers, or even as believers, but as more affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world more by feeling our way around it... One might say that in our everyday, mundane being-in-the world, we don't lead with our head, so to speak; we lead with our heart and hands.¹⁴¹

understood to be inessential to it and are not to be confused with the universal truth for which they are made to stand in." See Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire," 341.

¹³⁷ Functionalism tends to dissolve the distinction between religious practices, ideas, and ideologies and secular counterparts. Smith's approach seems closer to the functionalists, but with added nuance that merits the attention given in the sections which follow.

¹³⁸ Smith makes no distinction between love and desire. See Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 51n20.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁴⁰ Augustinian in that it grants a primacy to our love, not rational ideas. Smith cites Augustine's *City of God* 19.24 (London: Penguin, 2003); idem., *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New York City, 1996); idem., *Homilies on I John* 4.6 in *Augustine: Later Works*, ed. John Burnaby (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955). Smith's epistemology, as mentioned in chapter 2, is Augustinian in that it assumes that faith must precede understanding.

¹⁴¹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 47.

Because Smith believes gives much weight the affective nature of the human person, embodied rituals and material practices gain primacy over cognitive activity in forming human desire and identity. To apply this anthropology to the study of religion would mean scholars would have to look beyond doctrine and propositionalized content in order to “discover” religion in embodied in practices and institutions which form desire.

What does this anthropological account tell us about the definition of religion, and how does Smith’s view compare with current approaches? A simplified version of a substantivist approach, for example, would view religion as *humans believing in supernatural X*. Similarly, a functionalist would see it as *humans doing practice X*. Smith does not reject these elements, and it is fair to say that Smith’s model is much closer to the functionalist emphasis on practices. But the verb in Smith’s proposal is *desire*: **humans desiring ultimately X**. More than believing or doing, Smith is saying, humans are desiring animals, and those desires are more fundamentally driven not by beliefs by by formative practices, or “liturgies.” He puts it this way: “religion is an embodied, material, liturgical phenomenon that shapes our desire and imagination before it yields doctrines and beliefs.”¹⁴²

According to Smith’s model, it is not possible for human beings to avoid desire. He equates a human’s ultimate desire with their identity. Because desire is constitutive of humans, being religious is as well, such that humans “cannot help but be religious.” This, Smith claims, is part of human beings’ inherent structure, akin to what he refers to as Augustine’s notion of “structural religion.”¹⁴³ Desire is always operating, so all humans are, whether conscious of it or not, religious. Obviously, this claim goes against the notion of an individual or society being “secular” in the sense of having no religion. And that is precisely what Smith claims to show with his model.

What this anthropology offers to the study of religion is a way of maintaining the key elements of substantivist and functionalist approaches (i.e., belief and practice) while introducing new tools to examine religion. The key features of the anthropology of desire Smith is articulating are *intentionality* and *teleology*, which are shaped and inscribed through *habits* (Love’s Fulcrum) and *practices* (Love’s Formation).¹⁴⁴ Let’s consider each in turn.

¹⁴² Smith, “Secular liturgies,” 161.

¹⁴³ This paragraph from Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 113.

¹⁴⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 47-63.

Intending

Intentionality refers to Smith's claim that human persons' "being-in-the-world is always characterized by a dynamic, 'ek-static' orientation that 'intends' the world or 'aims at' the world as an object of conscious."¹⁴⁵ This aspect of his anthropology Smith articulates by retracing bit of the history of twentieth-century phenomenology, which is undoubtedly an important thread through his work. Contra Descartes, humans do not *simply think* (Smith encourages us to try) but always think *of* or *about* something. Pointing to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological maxim which states that "consciousness is always consciousness *of*..." something, Smith claims that human beings can never simply exist in the world without intending the worlding, without aiming at some object.¹⁴⁶ Human consciousness is intentional, and there are different ways, or modes, of intending. For example, when thinking of a friend, we may perceive her, remember her, be angry with her, remember her, love her, etc. A key issue for Smith is determining which mode is primary. Martin Heidegger, a student of Edmund Husserl and fellow phenomenologist, disagreed with his teacher that "perception" was most the fundamental mode of intentionality. Rather than perceiving a world of objects, Heidegger argued that first "we are *involved* with the world as traditioned actors. The world is an environment in which we swim, not a picture that we look at as distanced observers."¹⁴⁷ And the primary way we "intend," Heidegger claimed, is through *care*. This move was a critical in that it shifted the weight of the human person down to the noncognitive, "from the cerebral regions of the mind to the more affective regions of the body."¹⁴⁸ Smith sees this as a sign of Augustinian influence on Heidegger's thought. But Smith will be siding with this ancient source, he claims, by specifying that our most fundamental mode of intending is not *care*, but rather *love*.¹⁴⁹

To say that human beings intend the world in the mode of love is to say that "(ultimate) love is constitutive of our identity."¹⁵⁰ Neither what we say is most ultimate (or most important, most animating) nor is what we may even *believe* is most ultimate to us

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 48.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 49, emphasis original. Smith says that in *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), Heidegger suggests a "fundamental continuity between Descartes' rationalism and Husserl's particular, overly cognitivist version of phenomenology." Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 49n15.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴⁹ Smith writes that "what distinguishes Augustine's two cities (the earthly city and the city of God) is not ideas or beliefs but *love*," citing *City of God* 19.24. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 46n12.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 51.

actually defines who we are. Rather, as noted above, it is what we *desire*—consciously or unconsciously. These are “*ultimate* loves—that to which we are fundamentally oriented, what ultimately governs our vision of the good life, what shapes and molds our being-in-the-world—in other words, what we desire above all else, the ultimate desire that shapes and positions and makes sense of all our penultimate desires and actions.”¹⁵¹ Another way Smith describes this is *worship*, such that what humans ultimately love is what they worship. There is some ambiguity in Smith’s use of the word *worship* here. Is it the practices, or the intentionality of itself? In *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith seems to suggest both. He equates *worship* and *liturgy*, noting the latter as a “shorthand for naming worship practices of all kinds.”¹⁵² Yet later he suggests it is a mode of intentionality equivalent to love, writing that it is a “formal, ineradicable structure of human being-in-the-world.”¹⁵³ In short, is *worship* a liturgy or love (point 1 or 3 of the *homo liturgicus* model)? While it is true that Smith’s model is trying to show how liturgies and loves are intimately connected—indeed, inseparable—Smith nonetheless distinguishes between them. Use of *worship* is not frequent in his book, but consistent usage would add clarity.

While *worship* has religious connotations (indeed, as it is often associated with worship of a deity), Smith holds that in fact accurately indicates how all humans love/desire something as ultimate, even if they are unable to articulate this.¹⁵⁴ It is the human mode of intending the world. It is constitutive of a human, not merely for “passionate” or “romantic” types or “even specifically religious people.”¹⁵⁵ These assertions by Smith point to why his alternative philosophical anthropology challenges modern categories of secular and religious.

The importance that Smith places on the role of desire raises an important question: What is desire? As desire is central to the book—indeed, even part of its title—establishing how the term it used is important. Unfortunately, Smith does not offer an explicit definition of the term. Most of his writing on desire is concerned with describing *how* it works, but it would have been beneficial to the reader—practitioner and scholar alike—to have offered a

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 25n8. Later, in dialogue with Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann, Smith will characterize Christian worship as “the ordering and reordering of our material being to the end for which it was meant.” Ibid., 143. This is again more in line with worship as liturgy rather than a mode of intentionality.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 90n1..

¹⁵⁴ This resonates with an observation made in a famous speech by the (quintessentially?) postmodern writer David Foster Wallace at Kenyon College in 2005: “There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.” David Foster Wallace, “Plain old untrendy troubles and emotions,” *The Guardian*, September 20, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/sep/20/fiction>

¹⁵⁵ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 51.

clear description of the term. This is true as a matter of clarity for the argument, but particularly as *love* and *desire* are common words in colloquial English vocabulary (which perhaps is his point in using them as the core terms over more academic versions like “affects”), it would have been helpful to state how he uses them, as he does with *liturgy* and *religion*.

Nonetheless, one can ascertain from various passages that Smith holds *desire* to be a mode of “intending” the world, a description of the way humans “be” in the world. It is in contrast to the already mentioned intentionalities of perception or care, among other possibilities. Because he is keen to use it as a way of explaining human behavior, it is clear that *desire* is a way of describing a sort of subconscious motivation: “There is a sort of drive (or pull, depending on the metaphor) that pushes (or pulls) us to act in certain ways, develop certain relationships, pursue certain goods, make certain sacrifices, enjoy certain things.”¹⁵⁶ The claim is that humans are generally unconscious of *desire* and how it affects their behavior. It operates often in ways that cannot be perceived, leading to the possibility that actions and preferences provoked by *desire* may even be contrary to conscious registers. Donovan Shaefer, who has written on how affect theory could aid the study of religion, suggests it works like this: “At the personal level, we may find something ‘sad,’ but that response in the register of awareness does not dictate our preference—*whether our bodies move toward or away from that object*” (emphasis added).¹⁵⁷ *Desire*, then, can be understood in Smith’s anthropology as a way humans are pre-cognitively pushed/pulled in certain directions, to particular ends—which brings us to *telos*.

Aiming

The Greek word *telos* means “end” or “goal.”¹⁵⁸ Intentional creatures, Smith says, are also *teleological* creatures. Humans are desiring creatures aimed at some goal. Though we may not be conscious of it, “what we love is a specific vision of the good life, an implicit picture of

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 51-52.

¹⁵⁷ Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 26. Smith’s theory could benefit from interaction with a growing body of research which explicitly seeks to understand religion using affect theory. See Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Manuel Vásquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). (Admittedly, some of this research was published after Smith’s book!)

¹⁵⁸ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott. *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (7th ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 799.

what we think human flourishing looks like.”¹⁵⁹ It is an aesthetic vision of social, economic, personal, familial, personal, environmental relations. Here Smith echoes Charles Taylor, who describes these visions in the following way: “Every person, and every society, lives with or by some conception(s) of what human flourishing is: What constitutes a fulfilled life? What makes life really worth living? What would we most admire people for?”¹⁶⁰ The aim is not simply ideas or doctrines. Smith’s contention is that the *telos* is a vision that has captured our *imagination* through affective means, grabbing our “gut.” That means, more than a mere list of ideas and propositions, the narratives found in stories, films, and other art forms are what really pull humans: “Our ultimate love moves and motivates us because we are lured by this picture of human flourishing. Rather than being pushed by beliefs, we are pulled by a *telos* we desire.”¹⁶¹

None of this is to suggest that we do not also *have* a cognitive register that influences human behaviour and love. Smith acknowledges that if humans were *only* affective creatures, his entire project would be moot. To offset the (very) cognitive communication of his project, Smith therefore includes snippets of commentary on films, novels, and other cultural items to support his thesis more *affectively* than a typical philosophical treatise. But even when engaged in more cognitive pursuits, he claims, the affective register is always still at work.

In this portion of the model, one can see that different religions are distinguished by the different ends they seek. These ends could be transcendent, involving some notion of the supernatural, however defined. Or the ends could utterly immanent: a certain type of society, a certain lifestyle, etc. Thus, no *telos* could be secular in-and-of itself, since it is not the nature of the *telos* which makes a person’s love of it religious, but that the way a person intends it: whether or not a person loves it ultimately.

Habits

What mechanism determines the object of human desire? Smith claims that humans have “precognitive tendencies to act in certain ways and toward certain ends,” which he calls *dispositions* or *habits*.¹⁶² These are default virtues and vices which have become second nature

¹⁵⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 52.

¹⁶⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 16.

¹⁶¹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 54.

¹⁶² Ibid., 55. He notes “habits” is used by philosophers like Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Alasdair MacIntyre. In *Imagining the Kingdom*, Smith is more explicit in his debt to Pierre Bordieu’s concept of *habitus* a “system of structured, structuring dispositions” to “*construct* (constitute) our world in certain ways” (81).

to us (not first nature, as these are the biologically “hard-wired”) and thus are not part of conscious reflection. They are learned “attitudinal reflexes”¹⁶³ and thus “quasi-automatic”: “[T]he virtuous person is someone who has an almost automatic disposition to do the right thing ‘without thinking about it.’”¹⁶⁴ This is why they are the “fulcrum” of our desire: “they are the hinge that ‘turns’ our heart, our love, such that it is predisposed to be aimed at certain directions.”¹⁶⁵ Habits, more so than our reflections, aim human desire. But, as Smith notes, this merely pushes the question up another level: how do habits and dispositions get inscribed in humans?

Formation

According to Smith, habits are inscribed by *formation* which happens in in two ways: through the imagination, and through repeated, embodied, material practices. First, a *telos* becomes inscribed by “being *pictured* in concrete, alluring ways that attract us at the noncognitive level.” These pictures come through the aesthetic means of stories and images found in art and in marketing and entertainment. Smith claims these pictures work affectively through the senses, such that that “seep into us” in a way factual reporting does not.¹⁶⁶ While a cognitivist anthropology would emphasize that people are intellectually drawn to one (world)view or another based on propositional content, the desiring model emphasizes that humans’ imaginations are captured (passive voice here intentional) by images absorbed by affective means.

On the topic of practices it becomes especially apparent why so much weight is given to humans’ embodiment. Having claimed that the core of humans is not in the head but in the body, Smith claims that embodied practices “infuse noncognitive dispositions and skills in us through ritual and repetition precisely because our hearts (site of habits) are so closely tethered to our bodies.”¹⁶⁷ And these material practices and rituals often happen alongside the various aesthetic experiences of imagination which “mold and shape our precognitive

Contrary to some popular usage, here “habit” does not generally refer to behaviors themselves but the attitude/dispositions from which they flow.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 59.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 56. Smith holds that reflection is possible and important. But he notes that “prereflective” dispositions come first and conscious reflection is, at best, sporadic. See *ibid.*, 57 n34.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 56.

¹⁶⁶ This paragraph is from *ibid.*, 58. Note that the second volume in Smith’s Cultural Liturgies trilogy, *Imagining the Kingdom*, is a book-length treatment of how the “imagination” element of formation works. Due to space limitations, this second volume, despite its importance in Smith’s understanding of how cultural liturgies work, cannot be closely examined.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

disposition to the world by training our desires.”¹⁶⁸ Because desires are not abstract ideas grasped by the mind, they are shaped primarily by these embodied practices and the images absorbed through multiple bodily senses.

At this point, Smith notes that aspects of these claims regarding the embodied formation of human dispositions are not particularly new in the history of thought. But many of the claims in this model and others like them, despite the fact that are made by philosophers and theologians, are empirical, and thus should be testable by social sciences. Smith recognizes this need, and while he does not give a full treatment of the social scientific literature, he notes developments in cognitive psychology and neuroscience which may ground empirically this decidedly philosophical approach. For example, research has suggested that, contra Freud, much of our unconscious activity is not explained by repression but efficiency. This means that the unconscious is not necessarily a defense mechanisms, but rather it increases adaptive capacities (i.e., for survival). Smith cites the work of psychologist Timothy Wilson who claims that the “adaptive unconscious” sets goals, initiates action, evaluates—all tasks that Smith says are the tasks associated with desire.¹⁶⁹ While Smith spends just a couple paragraphs engaging the social scientific literature, there is clearly much more to be explored, researched, and said about how the philosophical and sociological study of religion could engage with these empirical disciplines.

3.3. Religious and Secular Liturgies

To understand how Smith’s anthropology seeks to challenge modern categories of *religious* and *secular*, two other important aspects of the formative practices described above are important. The first is the claim that practices are always communal/social, and are thus intimately tied to institutions:

There are no “private” practices; rather, practices are social products that come to have an institutional expression. Practices don’t float in society; rather they find expression and articulation in concrete sites and institutions—which is also how and why they actually shape embodied persons. There are no practices without institutions.¹⁷⁰

Second, Smith says that every practice, and the institution in which it is expressed, is *always* teleological. Practices are always aimed at some end, a specific vision of the good life,

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 59

¹⁶⁹ Timothy Wilson, *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁷⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 62.

though it may only be implicit, such that the practices themselves “carry” the *telos*.¹⁷¹ This means that human practices, being (publically) institutional and teleological, are always religious.

What makes Smith’s analysis interesting and provocative is that it claims that all institutions—even those normally considered secular—are in some sense *religious* institutions. It is impossible for any institution or practice to ultimately be religiously neutral because its practices are always *assuming* a particular philosophical anthropology. There is a “charged, *religious* nature of cultural institutions that we all tend to inhabit as if they were neutral sites.”¹⁷² This means that spheres and institutions normally considered secular (the state, schools, universities, cultural organizations, and others) are, because of their power to form human desire, religious. Of course, an anthropology assumed would rarely be articulated by most institutions, but Smith argues the practices themselves contain the pre-rational “understanding,” that the practices are always aiming human desire at some *telos*.

On the surface, this analysis may seem to align with functionalist approaches to religion. As already mentioned, functionalist approaches focus on what people *do*, on how social beliefs and practices function. This tends to dissolve religious and secular distinctions, such that Marxism and Islam both can serve similar functions in society. Because the desiring model of the human claims that all people desire some *telos* ultimately, and all practices implicitly carry a *telos*, it appears there is no escaping religion. But another piece of the model examined below adds a nuanced understanding of practices that indicates that there *are* elements of human life which do not carry the same religious weight as others. While significantly blurring modern lines between what is commonly thought to constitute the religious and the secular, Smith’s model indicates that not everything people do is religious.¹⁷³

The widest category of human activities Smith considers in his model is *ritual*: thin routines which are *not* directed at a particular *telos*, such as brushing teeth, the order in which someone gets dressed, or the order in which you eat the different foods on a dinner plate. These are repeated activities done with our bodies, but they do not have the ability to form

¹⁷¹ Smith acknowledges debt to Charles Taylor in his understanding of how practices can “carry” an understanding which a subject does not know how to articulate. “This ‘understanding’ is more on the order of know-how than propositional knowledge, more on the order of the *imagination* than intellect” See Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 66. This is why Smith will adopt the terminology of “social imaginary” over “worldview.”

¹⁷² Ibid., 23.

¹⁷³ And Smith says so explicitly in Smith, “Secular Liturgies,” 182n29.

humans' ultimate loves. They are "not usually pursued for their own sake; rather, they are instrumental to some other end." The "goods" sought are external to the practice, and thus they tend to be not identity-forming.¹⁷⁴ Thin practices can also be thicker based on what is driving them; i.e., the need to exercise to *be* a fit person (thicker) vs. for health to enjoy other things (thinner).

Practices are a thicker category within the species of ritual (Smith cites masonry, i.e., bricklaying, or riding public transit as examples). Unlike rituals, however, practices are indeed directed toward some end, yet they are not thick enough to direct a person's ultimate desire. It seems for Smith, then, that it is not enough for practices to merely have some kind of *telos* in order for those practices to shape desire and thus be religious.¹⁷⁵ He claims that "not all thick habits are specifically religious, but all thick habits are meaningful and identity-significant."¹⁷⁶ A frustrating aspect of the nomenclature here is that *practices* is used more broadly in the opening chapters than later chapters when the categorization is explained. Smith is most often commenting about specifically identity- and love-shaping practices, but these in fact are a specific type of practice which fall in the final and most important category discussed below.

The thickest practice on the spectrum of human rituals is what Smith deems as *liturgy*. Smith defines liturgies as "*rituals of ultimate concern*: rituals that are formative for identity, that inculcate particular vision of the good life, and do so in a way that means to trump other ritual formations."¹⁷⁷ In this liturgical anthropology of desire, there is a spectrum of practices which can be categorized according to their thickness. Not all of them are religious. Only the thick are considered liturgical, and thus religious, because they are "identity-forming, *telos*-laden, and get hold of our core desire—our ultimate love that define us in some fundamental way."

Our thickest practices—which are not necessarily linked to institutional religion—have a *liturgical* function insofar as they are a certain species of ritual practice that aim to do nothing less than shape our identity by shaping our desire for what we envision as the kingdom—the ideal of human flourishing. Liturgies are the most loaded forms of ritual practice because they are nothing less than our hearts. They want to determine what we love ultimately. By *ultimately*, I mean what we love 'above all,' that to which we pledge allegiance, that to which we are devoted in a way that overrules other concerns and

¹⁷⁴ Thin practices and ritual descriptions are from Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 82, 86.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 86: "[N]ot all rituals would be practices because not all rituals are directed toward an end."

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 83.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 87.

interests. Our ultimate love is what defines us, what makes us the kind of people we are. In short, it is what we worship.¹⁷⁸

A liturgical anthropology suggests that there are certain kinds of repeated, embodied behaviours which so affect human desires to create *ultimate* desires which trump others. When competing desires confront one another, the dominant desire which overrules all others is what determines one's religion.

Notice that, according to Smith, liturgies are *not* limited to those practices that are often considered "religious." But he says that "expanding our conception of what counts as 'worship' is precisely the point."¹⁷⁹ It is those practices which form ultimate desires, the core identity of a human, which enter the realm of liturgy, and thus religion. While this focus on "ultimacy" appears to have affinities with theologian Paul Tillich's definition of religion as "ultimate concern,"¹⁸⁰ Smith differentiates between his own project and Tillich's. The latter locates "an existential kernel that religions share in common," whereas Smith's model is "pluralist about what people and communities worship *as* ultimate."¹⁸¹ In other words, there is not one ultimate love toward which every human desire is oriented, though named differently and perhaps only loved unconsciously. Smith pluralist view, in this context, is that liturgies mold human desire into many incommensurate directions.

This pluralism goes beyond merely religious liturgies, such as the different pictures of human flourishing offered by Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity. Smith attempts to demonstrate that there are practices which constitute secular liturgies: those practices and institutions not typically considered religious but which nonetheless form ultimate human desires. The cultural institutions of which Smith gives an "exegesis" are the liturgies of the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. Cf. sociologist of religion Christian Smith's definition: "Liturgy ritually reenacts a tradition, an experience, a history, a worldview. It expresses in dramatic and corporeal form a sacred belief system in words, music, imagery, aromas, tastes, and bodily movement. In liturgy, worshipers both perform and observe, act out truth and have the truth act on them, remember the past and carry it into the future. Liturgy expresses, professes, performs, and informs. This is what religious liturgies do. *It is also exactly what human social life more generally does with cultural moral order.* All of the social practices, relations, and institutions that comprise human social life generally themselves together dramatize, ritualize, proclaim, and reaffirm the moral order that constitutes social life. *Moral order embodies the sacred story of the society, however profane it appears, and the social actors are believers in social congregation.* Together they remember, recite, represent, and reaffirm the normative structure of their moral order. All of the routines, habits, and conventions of micro interaction ritualize what they know about the good, the right, the true, the just. All of the systems and structures of macro institutional life do likewise. This is simply the way of moral, believing animals" (emphasis mine). Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.

¹⁷⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 86-87.

¹⁸⁰ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, (New York.: Harper & Row, 1957).

¹⁸¹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 87.

mall (consumerism), the stadium (nationalism/patriotism), and universities. The following is an excerpt from his description of consumerism's liturgies:

[M]arketing is the mall's evangelism; television commercials, billboards, Internet pop-ups, and magazine advertisements are the mall's outreach. The rituals and practices of the mall and the market are tactile and visceral—they capture our imaginations through the sense of sight and sound, touch and taste, even smell. The hip, happy people that populate television commercials are the moving icons of the consumer gospel, illustrations of what the good life look like: carefree and independent, clean and sexy, perky and perfect. We see the embodiments of this ideal again in the icon-like mannequins in the windows of the mall. The mall... communicates its story not through tracts and didactic lectures but through visual embodiments of the happy life, 3-D icons that we come to revere as ideals worthy of imitation. And because these visual and visceral media operate on our imaginary more than our intellect—because they seep into our imagination—they are slowly and often surreptitiously absorbed into our *kardia*, in the very nerve center of how we orient ourselves to the world.¹⁸²

In this description, the desire for material goods arises from the material, sensual liturgies which capture consumers' imagination. The practices of consumption, the embodied shopping that takes place in sensory rich malls, and the audio-visual narratives sold in marketing across media platforms, carry the *telos* that acquiring commodities will bring happiness, fulfillment, and flourishing.

Similar descriptions of the stadium and the university follow. The bodily motions which accompany national anthems (or the Pledge of Allegiance in American schools), the narratives embedded in the songs, the flags and fighter jets are examples of embodied practices which Smith considers nationalism's liturgies.¹⁸³ For the university, Smith examines the Cathedral of Learning in a secular American university and its aspirations for human reason, and the embodied and narrational elements of initiation, formation, and commissioning that take place over the course of a university education. Smith thinks elements of the latter have a "frenetic and frantic pace, rhythms of expenditure and exhaustion" which launch young adults into "careerism."¹⁸⁴

Analysis of these secular practices and institutions through the liturgical lens shows why Smith views them as deeply formative of human desire. Having relegated consciously held belief in the supernatural to secondary importance, he posits that the religiosity of these embodied practices depends upon the extent to which they shape ultimate loves. Thus, a methodology for the study of religion which assumed a liturgical anthropology would find religion in all sorts of practices and institutions commonly considered secular. This is because

¹⁸² Ibid., 95-96.

¹⁸³ Cf. William Cavanaugh's similar analysis of nationalism in *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

¹⁸⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 117. Unfortunately, the third and final volume which examines the state as a religious, liturgical institution will not be available until after this thesis is completed.

Smith believes “the ‘religious’ is essentially tied not to the transcendent or the otherworldly but to the *modes* of identity formation and the *status* of the practices that engender such.” The implication of this analysis is that “secular practices, *because* they are identity-forming, amount to *religious* practices.”¹⁸⁵

3.4. Assessing Smith’s Model

In addition to the issues pointed out above, a few points of ambiguity that occur in Smith’s work should be mentioned. In his attempt to displace the primacy of the cognitive in his writing on religion, some of his publications seem to be in tension with others when it comes to defining *religion*. While *Desiring the Kingdom* emphasizes that human beings are religious because of their desiring ultimately, Smith also seems to indicate that it is practices themselves which constitute religion. For example, he writes of “the heart of religion as practice” or as “primarily a ‘form of life’ and lived experience.”¹⁸⁶ This is virtually the same as the tension already seen in the use of *worship* in his work: is it a liturgy, or a mode intentionality? Is religion primarily a liturgy (either as practice or “form of life”), or is it the ultimate desire? There is no question that, for Smith, liturgy and desire are inseparably connected and thus central elements of religion, such that he is comfortable using them essentially interchangeably. That they are tightly bound is clear from the four pieces of his liturgical anthropology: intending (desire), aiming (teleology), habits, and formation (liturgy). The emphasis on practice also appears in a publication aimed at philosophers, which may explain his wish to hone in on a specific deficiency in that discipline which he sees. Nonetheless, if part of his goal is to rework the disciplines which study religion with new conceptual tools, it is crucial to maintain a consistent usage of terminology. Scholars need to know if, when discussing religion, Smith means to talk about desire, liturgy, or how these elements together form religion.

Smith’s categorization of human behavior into *ritual*, *practice*, and *liturgy* is a useful heuristic device. It helpfully explains how human embodiment matters and how and why different repeated behaviors can affect people’s identities. Smith acknowledges, however, that “the line between thin and thick practices will be fuzzy and hard to draw.”¹⁸⁷ The model seems to suggest that the religiosity or non-religiosity of human social conduct depends upon

¹⁸⁵ Both quotations are from Smith, “Secular Liturgies,” 178n4.

¹⁸⁶ Smith, “Philosophy of Religion Takes Practice,” 136.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 83.

where any given repeated action falls on the spectrum of thickness. So while the categorization is intuitively satisfying, there seems to be ambiguity in determining exactly when a behavior is formative *enough* to move up a category. This suggests that the model may be better explained as a continuum, such that practices are more or less religious. Clear lines are often difficult to draw, even when categories are given extremely clear definitions (which, as argued above, is not the case with Smith's use *practice*). The following visual conceptualization of Smith's model is offered as a slight modification in order to increase its applicability to often—as Smith knows—complex human phenomena:

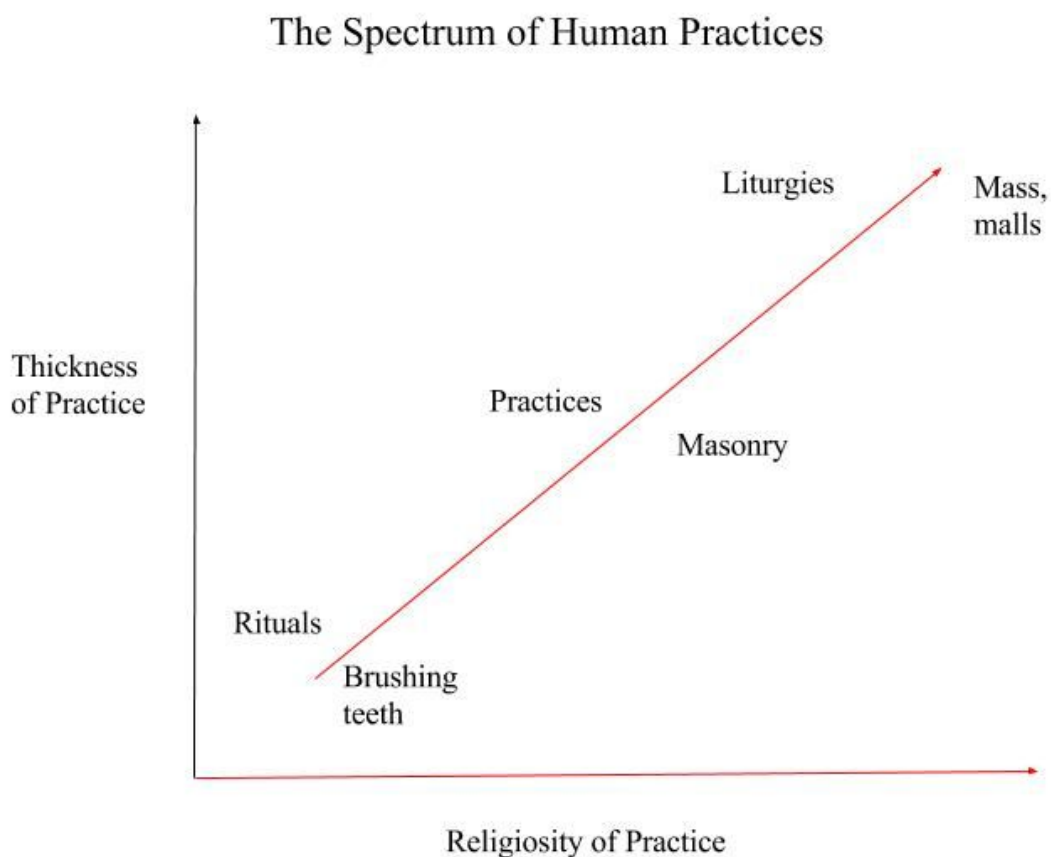


Figure 1

Smith says this his analysis implies that there is no secular. But it *does* make a distinction between “religious” practices found in liturgies and the “non-religious” rituals of brushing teeth and other mundane activities.¹⁸⁸ What, then shall we call these mundane aspects of life?

¹⁸⁸ Though again, a distinction is made by Smith: some mundane habits can relate in such a way to ultimate desires that they are, in some sense, religious. Exercise, if “hooked up” to one’s identity, can be more

In the first chapter, it was shown why Smith doubts the existence of the secular as an epistemological category. On that account, no secular worldviews would be free of religious belief in the sense of relying upon faith/narrative to ground knowledge. And his anthropological account also shows why he believes ultimate desire-shaping institutions and their practices should not be considered secular. But there are still aspects of human experience, such as brushing teeth and thicker activities which do *not* shape ultimate loves. What are these activities to be called? It is likely he would wish to drop the term *secular* as a descriptor here because of the baggage that comes with the word. Insofar as the rituals are not religious, another word such as *mundane* may be needed to provide the post-secular model with adequate vocabulary.

An important thing missing from Smith's project is a more detailed account of how one determines the thickness of a particular practice. He gives several examples which helpfully show how practices not thought of as "religious" can form us (the mall, the stadium, etc.), but nonetheless the criteria for determining the "thickness" of a particular practice are difficult to discern. For example, when Smith considers a person who stays at home on Sunday to read the latest issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, what aspects of this make it formative? Is it the reading itself which is formative? Is it the stories they are imbibing within the articles? Is a daily walk through the park filled with enough stimuli to shape our embodied imaginations? If Smith has given us a new radar, the instructions by which we would be able to operate it are as yet too vague.

One exceedingly complex issue in Smith's model is that it appears that humans can be formed by multiple liturgies—certainly across their lifetime, and probably within a single day. This is a challenge of which Smith himself is aware. He acknowledges that humans are "often fragmented, 'split' selves who might be simultaneously captivated by *competing* visions of the good. Few of us inhabit enclaves where only one story is dominant."¹⁸⁹ This notion of competing visions propelled by different liturgies may help explain the problem mentioned about of religious (in)congruence: if people's conscious religious—and secular—beliefs and identities are not generally consistent with their behavior, Smith's model would indicate this could be due to inhabiting a number of narratives and liturgical practices which shape desire

religious than if it is done more instrumentally for other, more ultimate goods. This is another distinction which in some ways complicates the model but also rightly highlights the complexity of human behavior and motivations, and thus the need of a spectrum of religiosity as shown above. See *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 55n30.

in unconscious ways. Though one possible explanation for incongruence is increased atomization and fragmentation as a result of technology, individualism, and the loss of traditional, tight-knit, and monolithic culture in a globalized world, incongruence is not a trend merely in the West or merely since the industrial revolution. As Chaves says, religious incongruence is seen “across religions, cultures, historical periods, and social contexts.”¹⁹⁰ A liturgical anthropology would not be surprised by this incongruence, but would rather look to the liturgical formation taking place communities and individuals in a given place to explain behavior.

But Chaves’ analysis also indicates that the problem of congruence may be deeper than Smith’s model can explain. Recall that, as a scholar seeking also to influence church practice, Smith indeed *seeks* congruence within his religious tradition: he wants the beliefs, values, and narratives of the Christian tradition to directly influence and form the practices, desires, and behavior of churches and their members. This means moving beyond the focus on cognitive content and teaching to emphasizing the embodied ritual formation, which leads Smith to an exposition of historic liturgical practices of Christian church services. Yet both Smith and Chaves realize these kinds of practices are not necessarily enough to create congruence, to create behavior congruent with stated beliefs and content. Chaves writes that “a lifetime of weekly churchgoing surely establishes internalized responses to certain hymns or stories or rituals or practices, but these internalized responses do not necessarily extend beyond the religious setting.”¹⁹¹ Smith comments that there are church members who, as he advocates in *Desiring the Kingdom*, are already involved in the week practices of Christian liturgies which he says *should* shape the desire for *shalom*—a biblical vision of human flourishing and justice. But Smith notes that, despite involvement in this liturgy, there is incongruence: members of this community are nonetheless openly participating in systemic injustices which he says goes against *shalom*.¹⁹² Chaves suggests that this kind of incongruence is to be expected unless “substantial cognitive effort, [and] intense and

¹⁹⁰ Chaves, “SSSR Presidential Address,” 4.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹² Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 208n115. Another way to view the issue is this: How could people in the same religious tradition, even the same religious community, have such radically different values in political and economic spheres? Smith is going beyond explanations which mere chalk these differences up to different textual interpretations.

consistent social reinforcement” happen so as to “activate” the religious schema that are important in religious communities and gatherings.¹⁹³

With the realities of religious incongruence, it is clear that human behavior is driven by much more than simply conscious beliefs. Smith’s liturgical anthropology seeks to account for this gap, and seems to better align with the empirical data summarized by Chaves which emphasizes practices. Yet there several aspects of Smith’s model must be explored to improve its explanatory and predictive power as a theory. A more thorough explanation of how people can inhabit multiple liturgies, how these liturgies compete, and how a liturgy can “trump” another are areas that should be investigated. Smith points to this need as well, noting that this kind of research would require a multidisciplinary approach and would have to engage the “empirical realities.”¹⁹⁴ Thus, several important questions remain to be explored in the study of how liturgies affect human bodies and desire—and, ultimately, human behavior.

Conclusion

The liturgical anthropology outlined by Smith seems to offer new, useful tools to the study of religion and its relationship to the secular. Influenced by the intellectualism of modernity, Smith makes the case that scholars are often overly-focused on the cognitive content of religion (particularly philosophy) and, even when examining practices, use a faulty methodology for determining *which* practices are considered religious (sociology). For Smith, religion is more a matter of the practices of the body than it is of the beliefs of the mind. Rather than asking what people think or believe, he thinks religion is about understanding what people desire above all. In his liturgical anthropology, he outlines a model in which liturgies form people’s dispositions, which aim their ultimate loves at certain *teloi*. This model, he says, better explains the data of human behavior. It is also challenges the notion of the existence of secular institutions and practices that can be religiously neutral.

While Smith’s analysis addresses some of the shortcomings in the study of religion (e.g., acknowledging and explaining religious incongruence), it leaves much to be explained in terms of understanding human behavior. Conceptual frameworks which prioritize the cognitive over embodied practices are rightly challenged by Smith, but understanding how various liturgies affect desire and ultimately behaviour still must be explored.

¹⁹³ Chaves, “SSSR Presidential Address,” 8.

¹⁹⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 208n115.

4. Post-secular Implications

Introduction

Having examined Smith's critique of the epistemology, ontology, and anthropology of modern approaches to religion and the secular, it is now possible to assess the implications. In several texts, Smith advocates for a normative post-secularism. First, a definition of "post-secular" will be given. The rest of this chapter will assess the possibilities for a post-secular approach to the study of religion, to the public sphere, and to understand religious conflict.

4.1. Defining Post-secularism

As with the terms "secular" and "religious," it is first necessary to define post-secular. It is, to large degree, dependent up which notion of the secular is modified by the preposition "post." The term is used in a variety of ways, though not all of them will be explored here.¹⁹⁵ As with all of the instances in which "post" is attached to some academic term, caution is warranted here. As scholars who edited a volume on the topic (which included a chapter by Smith) warn, "it is important to consider whether the concept of the post-secular refers to an actual shift in the social world, or whether its growing deployment results, instead from a zealous need to detect epochal turning points in every minor twist of the historical road."¹⁹⁶ The most important distinction to make for the purposes of this study is between post-secular as a descriptive term and as a normative term. Is the term meant to describe some phenomenon observed in society, or is it prescribing an attitude or institutional arrangements?

Descriptively, the post-secular can refer to an alleged reinvigoration of religion in the world, either generally or more specifically in the public sphere, connoting often an (at least) implicit rejection of the classical formulation of the secularization thesis. This usage is primarily sociological, an epochal demarcation which describes the current era as one in which religion has returned as a (public) presence. While Smith agrees with scholars who, based empirical evidence, have rejected the thesis that modernization *necessarily* brings

¹⁹⁵ James Beckford identifies six which are overlapping and sometimes incompatible in "SSSR Presidential Address: Public Religions and the Postsecular: Critical Reflections," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2012, 51: 1–19.

¹⁹⁶ Philip Gorski et al., "The Post-Secular in Question," in *The Post-secular in Question: Religion in Contemporary Society*, eds. Philip Gorski et al., (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 1.

secularization—he cites Peter Berger in particular—Smith’s usage of “post-secular” is generally not descriptive.¹⁹⁷

Another use of “post-secular” refers not to sociological phenomena but to a shift in consciousness or attitude toward religion. This usage could be merely descriptive as a way of describing shifting attitudes (though not religiosity), or normative as an attitude being advocated. While maintaining that Western society has remained secularized, sociologist José Casanova says this other sense of post-secular implies “reflexively abandoning or at least questioning the modern secularist stadial consciousness which relegates ‘religion’ to a more primitive, more traditional, now surpassed stage of human and societal development.”¹⁹⁸ This aligns with Jürgen Habermas’ usage of “post-secular” in his work on religion in the public sphere in this century.¹⁹⁹ Casanova suggests that to be post-secular in this sense is not to reject secularism *per se* but to resist the secular *Zeitgeist* which assumed European secularization to be the norm such that it was assumed to not need any elaboration. It is clear Smith welcomes such reflexivity, yet his sense of “post-secular” goes beyond this.

The primary sense in which Smith promotes a post-secularism is normative and, more than attitudinal shifts, seeks to challenge methodology, practice, and policy. Moving from his critique of the underpinnings of the secular as a-religious, un-traditioned and neutral, Smith’s constructive project advocates a post-secular pluralism in which secular perspectives, assumptions, arguments, institutions, and other manifestations are accorded the same status as those produced and held by religions. To return to the taxonomy introduced at the beginning of this thesis, Smith’s advocacy of a post-secularism is driven by 1) principled concerns about the coherence of the secular₂ and 2) pragmatic concerns to grapple with the diversity of religions, identities, and ideologies in society, or what Charles Taylor refers to as a secular₃ age.²⁰⁰ In his analysis, advocates of a secularism₂ have failed to realize that the secular₂ is itself a “take” or “construal,” and instead adopted the secular as “a standpoint that just takes

¹⁹⁷ The “secular” in this “post-secular” more or less corresponds to secular₁ (referring to the mundane, non-sacred) as outlined in the introduction.

¹⁹⁸ José Casanova, “Exploring the Postsecular: Three Meanings of the ‘Secular’ and Their Possible Transcendence,” in *Habermas and Religion*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2013), 33.

¹⁹⁹ See Jürgen Habermas, “Notes On Post-Secular Society,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25.4 (2008): 17-29.

²⁰⁰ With this understanding “secular,” Smith says it is wholly possible to have visible participation in religion. For Taylor, what make this a “secular” age is the *contestability* of religious belief due to the change in “conditions of the belief.” Modern countries have secularized in the sense of having gone from of “a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.” Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

its standpoint to be axiomatic, ‘the way things really are.’”²⁰¹ This, Smith says, is a refusal to acknowledge the existence of a secular₃ society.

4.2. The Study of Religion

What are the implications of Smith’s critique of the secular for the study of religion and of the social sciences in general? Because of the conditions of a secular₃ age, Smith believes a post-secular₂ social science is needed.²⁰² But the claim is actually even stronger. The epistemological argument is that “there never has been a secular₂ social science precisely because there is no unbiased, a-traditioned, neutral, universal standpoint. Our theorizing, and even our observation, begins from and is shaped by pre-theoretical commitments and is indebted to traditions of rationality.”²⁰³ This amounts to say that post-foundationalist epistemology *entails* post-secularism. The post-secular approach starts from the recognition the secular₂ *does not exist*. For those studying religion, this is indeed an “admittedly contentious and provocative suggestion.”²⁰⁴ To the extent it is resisted, Smith blames the philosophical anthropology still operative in definitions of religion.

What potential benefits are there to a post-secular methodology in the study of religion? According to Smith, it first “critically unmasks the naive conceit that posits any simple distinction between ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ on the basis of particular doctrines or beliefs (e.g., concerning gods or transcendence).”²⁰⁵ The benefit, then, seems to be that it removes analytically misleading labels to social phenomena. Post-secular sociological studies of religion in particular would then investigate beliefs and practices regardless of their orientations to the supernatural. Second, the focus would shift to see religion operating in the formative practices (liturgies) that have previously been overlooked. This means expanding objects of study to a wide range of cultural practices with no overt connection with or orientation toward the supernatural or transcendent, yet which are nonetheless formative in shaping people’s ultimate loves. In addition, it seems that sociological research on religion, in seeking to understand how liturgies of desire work on human bodies, would also have to be much more cross-disciplinary. Familiarity with cognitive psychology and neuroscientific

²⁰¹ Smith, “Secular Liturgies,” 164.

²⁰² Ibid., 165.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 176.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

research and even incorporating their empirical methodologies in examining the effects of liturgical practices on human behavior might characterize post-secular approaches to religion.

The implications for the philosophy of religion, according to Smith, are twofold: Instead of a focus on belief, “worship and liturgical practice [would] be made a more central object of philosophical consideration,” while “liturgical participation might be understood as a unique condition of possibility for philosophical reflection.”²⁰⁶ The liturgical focus comes from a turn away from the abstract universality of beliefs to “attention to religion as a form of life will require grappling with religion as inescapably particular and thus tied to particular practices.”²⁰⁷ This importance of the practices themselves stems from Smith’s claim that there is an “irreducibility” to the meaning of certain practices, such that they simply cannot be articulated propositionally. The question immediately arises: if the meaning of a practice is irreducible, how can a philosopher hope to articulate it? It is a tension already noted in Smith’s *Cultural Liturgies* series in which his critique of overly cognitive accounts is addressed with cognitive arguments. It seems that, for Smith, though irreducible meaning is embedded in practices, a philosopher can nonetheless *approximate* that meaning in words. That is, a philosopher could heuristically articulate a worldview implied and embedded in a set of practices for the purpose of analysis, all the while holding that those practices are ultimately irreducible. This is already done in a wide range of disciplines, so it is conceivable that it would be useful in this case as well. That seems to be the first key implication of a post-secular philosophical approach to religion.²⁰⁸

A more radical implication of a post-secular philosophical approach to religion would be the exploration of how (liturgical) religious practices themselves shape and prime the human mind—specifically, the philosopher or researcher—to think, reflect, and judge. Smith calls this humans’ “philosophical comportment to the world”:

On this account, the condition of possibility for a properly religious philosophy is not just access to a unique set of ideas unveiled by revelation, but participation in the liturgical practices of the community as a means of shaping the philosophical imagination and what constitutes 'rationality.'²⁰⁹

With philosophy of religion having gone through a shift in which philosophy from an overtly religious standpoint became more accepted, Smith wants to emphasize the importance of

²⁰⁶ Smith, “Philosophy of Religion Takes Practice,” 135.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 142.

²⁰⁸ Smith himself has attempted to do this with Pentecostal religious practices in *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

²⁰⁹ Smith, “Philosophy of Religion,” 144.

liturgy in shaping a religious philosopher's rationality. This an approach articulated by Peter Ochs, who has described Jewish Morning Prayer as a way of reorienting perception and judgments away from the propositional favored in secular culture.²¹⁰ The practice of prayer itself is a way to "nurture" this type of reasoning, and thus becomes a sort of prerequisite for a philosopher of religion writing about and from within a tradition. Because of Smith's suspicions of cognitivism, he radicalizes the approach one step to suggest that liturgical practices of religious traditions affect human rationality *and*—more importantly—desire as well. The liturgical anthropology would indicate "philosophical 'judgments' arise from a social imaginary that is profoundly shaped by ritual practices like Morning Prayer."²¹¹ This obviously indicates a rather radical departure from the current methodology of philosophy of religion, for it indicates a need for immersion in particular practices to be able to philosophize about religion adequately. On the one hand, with this post-secular approach philosophers who are writing outside their own traditions will in some sense be less equipped to deal with their topic. On the other hand, secular philosophers would then have to consider their own liturgical practices when assessing how their rationality and judgments are conditioned by their own tradition. The latter is likely to encounter considerable resistance (as may the former), but something of the sort seems to be implied by the post-secularism Smith has articulated.

4.3. Public Sphere

In the last several decades, liberal political theorists John Rawls, Martha Nussbaum, and Jürgen Habermas have moved toward more accommodating positions on the place of religion in secular society.²¹² It is clear that while Smith would welcome these developments, their accommodations do not go far enough. So what are the political implications Smith draws from the postmodern critique of knowledge?

If both secularism as a matter of policy and policy doctrine and secularization as a sociological expectation are undergirded by a distinctly modern, Enlightenment account of rationality as neutral, unbiased, and pristinely objective, then the postmodern critique of such modern notions of knowledge

²¹⁰ Peter Ochs, "Morning Prayer as Redemptive Thinking," in *Liturgy, Time, and the Politics of Redemption*, eds. Chad Pecknold and Randi Rashkover (Eerdmans Pub, 2006): 50-90. Idem., "Philosophic Warrants for Scriptural Reasoning," *Modern Theology* 22, no. 3 (July 2006), 465-482.

²¹¹ James K. A. Smith, "How Religious Practices Matter: Peter Ochs' 'Alternative Nurturance' of Philosophy of Religion," *Modern Theology* 24, no. 3 (2008): 469-478.

²¹² Martha Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* .

should entail criticisms of the sociological and political projects that grew out of this Enlightenment soil.²¹³

Smith is unequivocal about what he believes has been the success of the postmodern critique of the secular: though secularism remains a “powerful aspect of contemporary political rhetoric, the theoretical foundations for the secular have been systematically dismantled.”²¹⁴

The implications of a successful critique are that the idea of a religiously neutral public sphere must be abandoned, for the secular does not exist.²¹⁵ “In short, *there is no secular*, if by ‘secular’ we mean ‘neutral’ or ‘uncommitted;’ instead, the supposedly neutral public spaces that we inhabit—in the academy or politics—are temples of other gods.”²¹⁶ What this *should* entail is a “new space for confessional proclamation in the so-called ‘public’ or political sphere, but at the same time a public theology that eschews the Constantinian project.”²¹⁷ The critique should lead to “breaking open the spaces of the public and political sphere for religious voices and identities” in what Smith calls “a post-secular construction of the public sphere (whether the sphere of the university, political discourse, etc.).”²¹⁸

Much like the social sciences, a post-secular approach to the public sphere (politics, universities, media, etc.) would find illegitimate some of the current and advocated restrictions placed religion in public life. For example, limitations on religious reasoning in the public sphere defended in recent decades by some of the most prominent political philosophers, such as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, would be untenable in a post-secular society.²¹⁹ The epistemic status accorded secular values and beliefs—universal, accessible to autonomous, rational individuals—would not have greater weight than those labeled religious, nor would citizens be required to “translate” religious arguments into secular vocabulary. If, as Smith argued extensively, this epistemological assumption is faulty, the implications are categorical: “To the extent that the postmodern critique is effective, the modern notions of a

²¹³ Smith, “Secularity, Globalization, and the Re-enchantment of the World,” 9.

²¹⁴ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 33.

²¹⁵ Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault to the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 73.

²¹⁶ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 42.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

²¹⁹ Though, interestingly, over the last several decades both of these defenders of the liberalism and the modern project have become more accommodating and, indeed, positive, toward religion. For a overview of his shift, see Michael Reder and Josef Schmidt, “Habermas and Religion,” in Jürgen Habermas et al., *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age* trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 1-14.

neutral public space and secular sphere must be abandoned.”²²⁰ Public academic institutions, themselves being liturgical and thus carriers of their own particular *teloi* and “religious” orientation, would no longer have grounds upon which to treat “confessional” perspectives differently than a secular, academic perspective (legitimate fears of this possibility are addressed below).

Among the challenges Smith believes a post-secular public sphere would address is that of societal diversity, “of forging a life in common in neighborhoods, communities, territories, and states that are populated by citizens with divergent worldviews, different ultimate beliefs about the Good, and different practices and rituals that they understand to constitute a life well lived.”²²¹ Attempts to deal with such diversity have allegedly been through an imposed, hegemonic consensus that stifled difference. While noting is no shortage of religious versions of this (including Western Christendom), Smith says that there are “also secular versions of such intolerant consensus that seem to characterizes the newly emergent progressive intolerance that religious communities sense today.”²²² This is what was earlier referred to as a “theocracy without a god” whereby the public sphere is restricted to what is considered “rational” by secular Enlightenment standards. The post-secular approach would reject the imposed consensus.

To meet the challenge of diversity, Smith thinks a post-secularism must be more persistently pluralist.²²³ This does not entail that conceding every perspective is equally valid and correct, but rather that there is no neutral arbiter by which to decide. What does that mean in practice? Smith does not provide a detailed account of what a post-secular public sphere may look like, though one example he offers is the following: “there should be no disqualification of a distinctly Christian [or Islamic, Buddhist, etc] economic theory from the area of public discourse (in both the academy and the political square).”²²⁴ At which level discussions of confessional economic theories would be appropriate, Smith does not say. But the idea seems to be that dealing with the empirical sociological facts of pluralism is best achieved through openly acknowledging confessional differences and being allowed to maintain the particularities of one’s perspective in the public sphere.

²²⁰ Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 73

²²¹ James K. A. Smith, “Reforming Public Theology: Neocalvinism and Pluralism” (Herman Bavinck Lecture given at Theological University Kampen, The Netherlands, June 27, 2016), 2.

²²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²²³ Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 147.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

How is Smith's post-secularism different from current conceptions of a secular public sphere? Consider the approach advocated by Robert Audi who, along with John Rawls, takes a more restrictive view. He advocates limiting the public sphere to secular reason, which he defines as "one whose normative force does not evidentially depend on the existence of God (or on denying it) or on theological considerations, or on the pronouncements of a person or institution qua religious authority."²²⁵ But if Smith's analysis of secular reason holds up, every reason with "normative force" ultimately rests upon *some* faith assumptions—"theological or not"—so the epistemic differentiation is groundless. In a post-secular public sphere, whether one believes in human dignity by virtue of a deeply held theological conviction or the belief in the Kantian "moral autonomy of rational individuals" is irrelevant when advocating for a policy. The grounding can be articulated, but need not be. But to abandon the theological conviction or Kantian perspective would mean to *lose the grounds* for human dignity and thus the normative force of the reason. Political philosopher Jonathan Chaplin, taking this view, puts forward a helpful distinction between "public" and "secular" reason.²²⁶ To offer public reasons in a post-secular political debate is merely to offer "authentic articulations of a community's vision of the public good," recognizing no articulation will ever be completely rationally valid.²²⁷ The grounding of *belief in human dignity* may be "secular" (Kantian) or "religious" (theological), but advocating a policy by appealing *merely* to human dignity would be an appeal to a "public" reason. In the face of the challenge of pluralism, Nicholas Wolterstorff states that the liberal and secular approach seeks "the politics of a community with a shared perspective," and Smith's post-secularism indeed implies that "we must learn to live with a politics of multiple communities."²²⁸

One fear among those who oppose the increased presence of religious actors and perspectives in the public sphere is over the potential opening for groups with theocratic tendencies to gain influence in institutions and political power. As already noted, Smith is critical of many contemporary versions of an "anti-secularism" that amounts to a theocratic

²²⁵ Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997). 26n26.

²²⁶ Jonathan Chaplin, *Talking God: The Legitimacy of Religious Public Reasoning* (Theos 2009), 38-40. Chaplin comes from the same Dutch Reformed tradition and has cooperated in several publication venues.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 44. Chaplin goes on: "Liberal secularists suggest it is an epistemological question: it depends on the inner cognitive content of the reason. It isn't. It's a sociological question: it depends on what the audience happens to know or understand or be willing to accommodate."

²²⁸ Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square*, 154. This topic is obviously much too big and not sufficiently germane to fully discuss here in detail, and many of the nuances have to be omitted.

project to re-couple political institutions and the public sphere with religions and their institutions. He even approvingly cites Graham Ward's assessment that "in certain countries of the world a good dose of secularism would break the repressive holds certain state-ratified religions have over people's lives."²²⁹ Nonetheless, in Western liberal democracies in particular, the post-secular approach to pluralism—being a reaction *against* the imposed hegemonic consensus of the secular—would resist these theocratic aspirations by enabling the full range of traditions and communities (including secular groups) to participate.

4.4. Religious Conflict

Most germane to the topic of religion, conflict, and dialogue is the way in which Smith's critique of the modern approach to religion and the secular and advocacy of post-secularism would contribute to debates regarding religious conflict/violence. A preliminary note is that Smith was slated to write a book on the topic, a project that was never completed.²³⁰ While a book-length treatment would provide more basis for analysis, it is still possible to discuss the potential contribution to the study of religious conflict from the following: 1) Smith's references to the issue of religious and violence in his published work; 2) the acknowledgement that a book by scholar William Cavanaugh, with whom Smith shares much intellectually and with whom he has collaborated, covers the topic from a perspective he endorses;²³¹ and 3) the implications of Smith's theoretical work.

In analysing Jacques Derrida's "religion without religion," Smith summarizes the charge that religion and violence are linked: "Religions, such as the religions of the Book, have a disturbing legacy of violence that is linked to claims of uniqueness with universal pretension, claims to possession of *the* Law, *the* definitive revelation, *the* Truth, *the* one and only Way, *the* Messiah, even."²³² Here, Smith is articulating Derrida's critique of religion, yet it is a common sentiment that religion's exclusive truth claims are what lead them to violence. On this account, it is inevitable that "determinate, content-ful religion always ends up in war,

²²⁹ Graham Ward, *True Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), ix, 1. Cited in Smith, "Secularity, Religion, and the Politics of Ambiguity," 116n2.

²³⁰ The intended title was *Deconstructing Myths of Religious Violence: Derrida and the Logic of Determination*. See James K. A. Smith, "Limited Incarnation," in *Hermeneutics At the Crossroads*, eds. Bruce Ellis Benson, James K. A. Smith, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 128-129n45.

²³¹ Personal communication with the author.

²³² James K. A. Smith, "Determined Violence: Derrida's Structural Religion," *The Journal of Religion* 78, no. 2 (1998), 207.

precisely because of its determination to guard the contents of its positive revelation.”²³³ The appropriate response for those who seek peace and justice, then, would be to replace religion with something that is devoid of this determinate content. Smith says this is an attempt to “produce a structure that is divorced from the content of any particular, historical, determinate, positive religion,” a transcendence without a definite transcendent.”²³⁴ But Smith’s critique of the secular suggests that such a thing is an impossibility. Every religion, every worldview, every value and belief, is based on embodied, historical, and geographical elements which a human subject cannot escape. This would be true of every liturgically formed human, so the “very modern notion of an ahistorical, a-geographical, transcendental religion” is an impossibility.²³⁵ The conclusion is that it would thus be incoherent to point to religion *per se* as a cause of violence.

A post-secular approach to the issue of religious violence can be seen in the work of scholar William Cavanaugh. In *The Myth of Religious Violence*, Cavanaugh critiques the way in which the study of religion is tied to modernity itself. He argues that the Wars of Religion, rather than providing the impetus for a secular state to arbitrate among different religious confessions, were rather the *product* of the modern (violent) project of nation-state building already underway.²³⁶ The contingent configurations of power that arose in modernity, Cavanaugh says, have produced the category of religion. His primary claim is that “[t]here is no transhistorical and transcultural essence of religion and essentialist attempts to separate religious violence from secular violence are incoherent.”²³⁷ This is broadly how Smith post-secularism would approach the question of religious vs. secular violence. The important question for Cavanaugh is not whether religions are or can be violent. The empirical fact of religious actors with religious ideologies and practices committing acts of violence is undeniable. It is the analytical distinction from secular violence that is at issue, which leads to what he sees as the most pertinent question for the study of violence: “Under what circumstances do ideologies and practices of all kinds promote violence?”²³⁸

²³³ Ibid., 207.

²³⁴ Ibid., 208.

²³⁵ Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 122.

²³⁶ Led by local elites, “Absorption of church into state... before the Reformation... was a crucial component of rise of the state and turmoil.” William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, (Oxford University Press, 2009) 166.

²³⁷ Ibid., 3-4.

²³⁸ Ibid., 226.

This leads to the consideration of how Smith's liturgical anthropology affects the study of religious violence. Recall that Smith's model was meant to better explain human social behavior, which certainly includes violence. One of the key claims of the model is that behavior is not driven primarily by conscious beliefs, but rather by desires. This would indicate that, when trying to understand violent actions, examining the religious or secular doctrines of a violent group would not be sufficient to explain its behavior, and certainly would not be the driving factor and focus of analysis. Instead, that group's liturgical practices, the *teloi* they aim at, the narratives absorbed affectively through aesthetic experiences: these are the elements which must be studied to understand why a group resorts to violence. To rephrase Cavanaugh's question above: What are the kinds of liturgical practices which lead to violence? Under what circumstances do those liturgical practices lead to violence?

If religion is more about ultimate desire than about belief in the supernatural, religious violence may be more widespread than currently thought. The violence of nationalist groups is perhaps associated with an ultimate desire for a particular vision, based on a narrative of their "imagined community," of how their political life should be ordered. The violence of one ethnic group against another may be driven by an ultimate desire for the superior position of one's ethnicity, an exalted position above all other ethnic identities. The violence of individuals, whether honor killings, domestic violence, or gun violence in the United States could be analyzed from the perspective of liturgies of desire. One could even posit that for an individual or group to reach the point of deciding on a violent course of action, the intensity of such behavior may mean that an ultimate desire of some sort *must* be operating. The rather interesting implication may be that while not all religion is violent, *all violence may be religious*. This of course would apply to any entity, whether an individual or the state that is currently designated "secular."

For those interested in not only understanding violence but also in seeking to minimize it and promote peace, a post-secular approach might entail analyzing the kinds of liturgical practices that lead groups and individuals away from violent behavior. As with the case of violence, it would be important to understand the political, economic, and social conditions and how these affect the efficacy of peace-promoting liturgies. This is likely a complicated task given that, as Smith mentions in his work, multiple liturgies are likely working simultaneously in complex social environments. Isolation of violence- and peace-inducing liturgical practices may thus be difficult and possibly highly dependent on context. For

example, while nationalistic liturgies and narratives may not lead to violence by non-state actors in a stable, developed country with effective law enforcement, they may do so in a developing country with poor institutions. Motivation and driving factors may be mixed. Non-state actors engage in violence based on their particular religious practices and desires, while an individual may join the opposing military of nation-state which reacts against that religious group for various reasons.

A post-secular approach to state violence would clearly see it as religious from a liturgical lens, given that a state is arguably the most powerful institution in modern societies (though, depending on one's perspective, the institutions of capitalism may also have that title). But the issue of the secular state and religious violence also goes beyond armed hostilities on the part of the state. Related to the discussion in section 4.3, a secular public sphere which allots minimal space to confessional identities could be one of the factors in the religious violence. There is a certain irony here, given that the story of the rise of the secular state is that it was necessary to *avoid* the violence seen in Europe as Catholic Christendom splintered into smaller confessional regions. Saba Mahmood has summarized how the strategy of secularism may backfire: "[T]he political solution secularism offers consists not so much in 'avoiding religious strife' but in making sure those religious life/forms that are deemed incompatible with a secular political ethos are made provisional, if not extinct. Such a strategy may well lead to more, rather than less, religious strife."²³⁹ Why would this be? Smith's analysis offers one answer: secular European states pose a threat to minority religious communities because of the "state's status as a kind of religious institution which demands allegiance."²⁴⁰ Religious conflict could then be seen as a sort of resistance to competing demands of ultimate allegiance. The example of France, where religious particularity is supposed to be subordinate to the national identity, is but the most extreme example.²⁴¹ The post-secular pluralism advocated by Smith offers an alternative approach to negotiating religious, national, or any kind of ultimate identity, and more research could explore new possibilities for how states could approach the issue of Muslim minorities in post-Christian

²³⁹ Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire," 332n11.

²⁴⁰ Smith, James K.A. "Secularity, Religion, and the Politics of Ambiguity," 121.

²⁴¹ For an analysis of this phenomenon, see John Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), and Joan W. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

societies. Perhaps new public, post-secular liturgies could be utilized to promote peace and cohesion, yet in subordination to the particular and primary religious confessions of citizens.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the implications of Smith's critique of the modern approach to religion and the secular by considering what a post-secular approach would mean for the study of religion, for thinking about religion in the public sphere, and for the study of religious violence. It was found that a post-secular philosophy and sociology of religion would make a significant methodological shift toward looking at liturgical practices and desire in determining what counts as religion and which elements of religion to consider. This would require much interdisciplinary cooperation across social and hard sciences. A post-secular public sphere would include more openly confessional voices in academia and politics without a need to limit discourse to "secular" reason—though public reason *à la* Chaplin is likely beneficial in a pluralistic society of many communities. Finally, a post-secular approach to religious violence would not find religion as inherently violent, but that all violence may be religious. A post-secular public sphere may also contribute to creating space and policies which reduce religious minorities' marginalization, hostility, and violence.

Conclusion

This study has used the thought of James K. A. Smith as a guide for understanding and challenging the concepts of religion and the secular. Using three subfields of philosophy, it was shown how Smith understands these concepts and their theoretical underpinnings to be faulty. Proposals for a post-secular approach to several issues were shown to be potentially fruitful lines of research.

Chapter 2, focusing on a critique of the secular, found that before being political, the secular is an epistemic category which rests upon Enlightenment foundationalism. The status of secular knowledge is supposedly universal and un-traditioned, accessible by all. Smith, along with many others influenced by postmodern thought, finds these Cartesian approaches to knowledge unsustainable. A post-foundationalist approach which acknowledges particularity, situatedness, and the storied nature of all knowledge was a cogently proposed solution. Similarly, it was shown that the secular also has ontological assumptions of a closed, autonomous immanence which places “being” above transcendence. It was shown how this informs the field of natural science and leads to an atomizing social ontology, giving secular theorizing and science an unwarranted privileged epistemic status. Smith’s proposal of a reenchanting ontology was found to be a logical rebuttal to assumed immanence which could affect social theorizing, though not in obvious ways not covered by contemporary communitarian theorists. Reenchantment would mean science loses the particular status it has as an arbiter of knowledge, though it does not seem to point to new methodologies for natural science itself.

Chapter 3, focusing on the modern concept of religion, found that Smith’s critique claims that religion relies upon an overly cognitive, belief-centered anthropology. Philosophy and sociology both approach religion with this methodology, determining what counts as religion based on beliefs (in the supernatural). This philosophical anthropology does indeed have problems explaining human behavior, of which religious incongruence was shown to be a prime example. The rest of the chapter explored Smith’s project of a liturgical anthropology, which posits that human beings (and their religion) are better defined by what they desire/love. That desire, he claims, is shaped by formative practices called “liturgies.” This theory suggests that liturgies are essentially inescapable, being embedded in practices and institutions, and that all people desire *something* ultimately. Religion, then, is in all sorts of “secular” places and habits philosophers and sociologists would not typically consider

religious (shopping malls, sports stadiums, etc.). It was shown that Smith's understanding of religion still has certain tensions, namely in whether it is defined by the liturgies practices, the desire, or the overall process of them interacting. It was proposed that Smith's approach of religion/religiosity be made explicitly into a spectrum depending upon the formative strength of a given practice (Figure 1). Yet the problem of understanding how humans inhabit multiple liturgies simultaneously was shown to be a significant challenge for Smith's theory in understanding behavior.

Chapter 4 assessed how the implications of Smith's analysis point to a need for a post-secular approach to the study of religion, the public sphere, and religious conflict. Post-secularism was defined a normative approach which, more than the Habermasian notion of an attitudinal shift, abandons the superior status of secular₂ and gives equal status to all traditions. In the study of religion, this was shown to mean that "secular" liturgies would no longer be considered non-religious by sociologists and religious liturgical practices would be considered (and practiced!) by philosophers. The public sphere would allow space for confessional identities, arguments, and theories and yet still value a "public" reason as articulated by Jonathan Chaplin. A post-secular understanding of religious conflict would reject the claim that religious particularism is *necessarily* violent as well as challenge distinctions between secular and religious violence. In particular, the liturgical anthropological model would lead researchers to ask which *practices* and *institutions* lead to violence—whether state, group, or individual violence—and which promote peaceful social cohesion. It was suggested that this model may also indicate that *all* violence, because of its likely connection to ultimate desires, may be religious, including all state violence. Another potential application was that post-secular pluralism in the public sphere may address some of the contemporary challenges of cultural and religious diversity and conflict in politically secular European states.

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